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PERSONS AND POLEMICS

The Poverty of Theory:

or an

Orrery of Errors

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"To leave error unrefuted is to encourage intellectual immorality" Karl Marx

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Introduction

This essay is a rarity among Edward's published work. Although he was throughout his life interested in the philosophy of history and in various theoretical formulations, he concerned himself with these mainly in private reading and private discussion. As a historian and as a writer on political matters he was concerned to examine particular problems rather than to enunciate overarching general principles. He approached his subject matter certainly with expectations – even assumptions – which were to be tested against the evidence. Such prior conceptions often demanded new kinds of evidence, and one of Edward's contributions to historiography was that he, along with others of his generation, opened up new sources for the study of past societies as well as interrogating many existing sources in new ways. He came from a tradition of Marxist historiography, but always preferred to refer to a tradition rather than a system. Towards the end of his life he ceased to consider himself a 'Marxist' – not because he no longer respected the tradition, but because the term had acquired a quasi-religious connotation which seemed to involve arguments which were irrelevant to the fruitful development of the positive elements in the tradition. He preferred to call himself a 'historical materialist'.

Why then did he write this essay? He had read the works of Louis Althusser and found very little in them to affect his work. There have been numerous proponents of closed systems in religious thought and at the fringes of philosophy whose work has not concerned historians to any great extent. The basic platonic mode of thought by which human endeavour is to be judged by its degree of approximation to a pre-existing ideal is

to be found in most system of religious thought in which the teacher, by exegetic or hermeneutic means extracts the truth from some form of holy writ. That there have been elements of such an approach in some forms of Marxist writing cannot be denied, but on the whole the historians who were writing in the tradition in the fifties and sixties were more interested in Marx as a major intellectual influence than as a prophet. When Althusser appeared on the scene he made little impact on practising historians. For some reason however, he suddenly became a major force among graduate students and some young historians and literary scholars. Most historians would have been prepared to wait for the new influence to demonstrate its validity in the production of innovative work in history; not only did this not happen, but Althusser's followers – even some of the historians among them – began to declare that history was a non-discipline and that its study was of no value.

It was the influence that Althusser's writings were having on scholarship that made Edward take on the uncongenial task of putting the case for history against his closed system. We had been attending a series of international seminars on Social History in Paris, and found that scholars who shared our outlook in France, Germany and the United States were having the same experience. Edward read up all the relevant published work and packed volumes and notes into a car and we set out to spend a fortnight out of the tourist season on the shore of Lake Garda. We walked in the hills each morning, had lunch and then spent the afternoon and evening writing. So this essay was actually written in two weeks of intensive work, being argued about and corrected as it went along. It was intended as a polemical statement and written for a particular moment.

Of course it produced responses. Some of these emerged at an extraordinary evening at a History Workshop conference in Oxford in December 1979. This was for some reason held in a dimly-lit ruined building, and had been set up as a discussion. It ended up however as an emotionally-charged event whose

repercussions continued for months if not for years. Unfortunately the paper to which Edward was replying which had particularly annoyed him when he saw it a short time before the debate, seems to have been completely re-written for the published version.¹ Nevertheless, the point to which he took particular exception is explained in his published reply – his categorisation as a 'culturalist'. At the end of the evening a leading History Workshop character asked whether he would continue to publish relevant material. Edward replied that he thought he would not be publishing much of anything for a while, since he felt that his time would be taken up in trying to organise opposition to the siting of cruise missiles in Britain. The answer was 'cruise *what* Edward?'

As a definitive work of 'theory' the essay has many shortcomings. It is much more a defence of history than an exposition of an alternative to Althusser's views of Marxism. Edward saw the dispute not only as a scholarly one, but as the tackling of a set of intellectual assumptions which in politics could be taken to justify Stalinism and the discredited methods of the old Communist parties. Readers of Althusser's autobiography, a strangely haunting volume which is now available in English as well as French² may feel that the gulf between the two writers lies not only in their different intellectual approaches but in their whole lives. Perhaps one may even use the despised word 'experience'?

Dorothy Thompson

1 (ed) Raphael Samuel, *People's History and Socialist Theory*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981, pp. 375–409.

2 Louis Althusser, *The Future Lasts Forever*, New Press, New York, 1993.

THE POVERTY OF THEORY:

or

AN ORRERY OF ERRORS

'Disciples do own unto masters only a temporary belief and a suspension of their own judgement until they be fully instructed, and not an absolute resignation or perpetual captivity. . . So let great authors have their due, as time, which is the author of authors, be not deprived of his due, which is, further and further to discover truth.'

Francis Bacon

'Reason, or the ratio of all we have already known, is not the same that it shall be when we know more.'

William Blake

i

For some time, for many decades, the materialist conception of history – the first-born intellectual child of Marx and Engels – has been growing in self-confidence. As a mature practice ('historical materialism') it is perhaps the strongest discipline deriving from the Marxist tradition. Even in my own lifetime as a historian – and in the work of my own compatriots – the advances have been considerable, and one had supposed these to be advances in *knowledge*.

This is not to say that this knowledge is finite, or subject to some 'proof' of positivistic scientism. Nor is it to suppose that the advance has been unilinear and un-problematic. Sharp disagreements exist, and complex problems remain not only unsolved but scarcely even disclosed. It is possible that the very

success of historical materialism as a practice has encouraged a conceptual lethargy which is now bringing down upon our heads its necessary revenge. And this is the more possible in those parts of the English-speaking world where a vigorous practice of historical materialism has been conducted within an inherited 'empirical' idiom of discourse which is reproduced by strong educational and cultural traditions.¹

All this is possible, even probable. Even so, the case should not be over-stated. For what a philosopher, who has only a casual acquaintance with historical practice, may glance at and then dismiss, with a ferocious scowl, as 'empiricism', may in fact be the result of arduous confrontations, pursued both in conceptual engagements (the definition of appropriate questions, the elaboration of hypotheses, and the exposure of ideological attributions in pre-existing historiography) and also in the interstices of historical method itself. And the Marxist historiography which now has an international presence has contributed significantly not only to its own self-criticism and maturation (in *theoretical* ways), but also to imposing (by repeated controversies, much arduous intellectual labour, and some polemic) its presence upon orthodox historiography: imposing (in Althusser's sense) its own – or Marx's – 'problematic' upon significant areas of historical enquiry.

Engaged in these confrontations we had, I suppose, neglected our lines of theoretical supply. For in the moment when we seemed to be poised for further advances, we have been suddenly struck from the rear – and not from a rear of manifest 'bourgeois ideology' but from a rear claiming to be more Marxist than Marx. From the quarter of Louis Althusser and his numerous followers there has been launched an unmeasured assault upon 'historicism.' The advances of historical materialism, its supposed 'knowledge', have rested – it turns out – upon one slender and rotten epistemological pillar ('empiricism'); when Althusser submitted this pillar to a stern interrogation it shuddered and crumbled to dust; and the whole enterprise of historical materialism collapsed in ruins around it. Not only does it turn out that men have never 'made their own

history' at all (being only *träger* or vectors of ulterior structural determinations) but it is also revealed that the enterprise of historical materialism – the attainment of historical knowledge – has been misbegotten from the start, since 'real' history is unknowable and cannot be said to exist. In the words of two post-Althusserians, whose merit it is to have carried Althusserian logic to its own *reductio ad absurdum*, 'History is condemned by the nature of its object to empiricism.' But empiricism, as we know, is a disreputable manifestation of bourgeois ideology: 'Despite the empiricist claims of historical practice the real object of history is inaccessible to knowledge.' It follows that:

Marxism, as a theoretical and a political practice, gains nothing from its association with historical writing and historical research. The study of history is not only scientifically but also politically valueless.²

The project to which many lifetimes, in successive generations, have been given is thus exposed as an illusion (if 'innocent') and something worse (if not). And yet historical materialists, of my own generation, have been slow to acknowledge their own abject exposure. They go on working in their old, reprobate ways. Some are too busy to have read the indictments entered against them, but those who have appear to have reacted in one of two ways. Many have glanced at the antagonist in a casual way, seeing it as a weird apparition, a freak of intellectual fashion, which, if they close their eyes, will in time go away. They may be right in the first assumption – that Althusserian 'Marxism' is an intellectual freak – but it will not for that reason go away. Historians should know that freaks, if tolerated – and even flattered and fed – can show astonishing influence and longevity. (After all, to any rational mind, the greater part of the history of ideas is a history of freaks.) This particular freak (I will argue) has now lodged itself firmly in a particular social *couche*, the bourgeois *lumpen-intelligentsia*³: aspirant intellectuals, whose amateurish intellectual preparation disarms them before manifest absurdities and elementary philo-

sophical blunders, and whose innocence in intellectual practice leaves them paralysed in the first web of scholastic argument which they encounter; and *bourgeois*, because while many of them would *like* to be 'revolutionaries', they are themselves the products of a particular 'conjuncture' which has broken the circuits between intellectuality and practical experience (both in real political movements, and in the actual segregation imposed by contemporary institutional structures), and hence they are able to perform *imaginary* revolutionary psycho-dramas (in which each outbids the other in adopting ferocious verbal postures) while in fact falling back upon a very old tradition of bourgeois élitism for which Althusserian theory is exactly tailored. Whereas their forebears were political interventionists, they tend more often to be diversionists (enclosed and imprisoned within their own drama) or 'internal émigrées'.⁴ Their practical importance remains, however considerable, in disorganising the constructive intellectual discourse of the Left, and in reproducing continually the élitist division between theory and practice. Maybe, if we suffer experiences sharp enough, the freak *will* eventually go away, and many of its devotees may be reclaimed for a serious political and intellectual movement. But it is time that we pushed it along the road.

The other reaction commonly found among historical materialists is more reprehensible – that of complicity. They glance at Althusserian Marxism and do not wholly understand it (nor like what they understand), but they accept it, as 'a' Marxism. Philosophers cannot be expected to understand history (or anthropology, or literature, or sociology) but Althusser is a philosopher doing his own thing. And some conceptual rigour is no doubt necessary; perhaps even bits can be borrowed ('over-determination', 'instances')? After all, we are all Marxists together. In this way, a sort of tacit compromise is negotiated, although most of the negotiation is made up of silence, and *all* the negotiation consists in ceding ground to Althusser. For Althusser has never offered compromise of any kind: and certainly not to 'historicism', 'humanism' and 'empiricism.'

This is reprehensible because it is theoretically unprincipled.

Althusser and his acolytes challenge, centrally, historical materialism itself. They do not offer to modify it but to displace it. In exchange they offer an a-historical theoreticism which, at the first examination, discloses itself as idealism. How then is it possible for these two to co-exist within one single tradition? Either a very extraordinary mutation has been taking place, in the last few years, in the Marxist tradition: or that tradition is now breaking apart into two – or several – parts. What is being threatened – what is now actively rejected – is the entire tradition of substantive Marxist historical and political analysis, and its accumulating (if provisional) knowledge. And if (as I suppose) Althusserian Marxism is not only an idealism but has many of the attributes of a *theology*, then what is at issue, within the Marxist tradition, is the defence of reason itself.

ii

I will offer at the outset a map of where I mean to go, since there will inevitably be certain detours, and the doubling back upon my own tracks. I shall direct my central attention to Althusser – and to the critical formative texts, *For Marx* and *Reading Capital* – and will not spend time over his numerous progeny. It is true that many of these disown their master, and that others are influenced only in certain areas of their thought. But I hope that some of my general arguments (in particular on 'empiricism' and 'moralism') may be taken to include them also. I apologise for this neglect; but life is too short to follow (for example) Hindess and Hirst to every one of their theoreticist lairs. Nor shall I take up the lists against a more formidable opponent, Poulantzas, who – with Althusser – repeatedly fails to understand the *historical* categories (of class, ideology, etc.) employed by Marx. Another time, perhaps. Let us stay now with the Aristotle of the new Marxist idealism.

I will argue the following propositions, and examine them in sequence. 1) Althusser's epistemology is derivative from a limited kind of academic learning-process, and has no general validity; 2) As a result he has no category (or way of handling)

'experience' (or social being's impingement upon social consciousness); hence he falsifies the 'dialogue' with empirical evidence inherent in knowledge-production, and in Marx's own practice, and thereby falls continually into modes of thought designated in the Marxist tradition as 'idealist'; 3) In particular he confuses the necessary empirical dialogue with *empiricism*, and consistently mis-represents (in the most naive ways) the practice of historical materialism (including Marx's own practice); 4) The resultant critique of 'historicism' is at certain points *identical* to the specifically anti-Marxist critique of historicism (as represented by Popper), although the authors derive from this opposite conclusions.

This argument will take us some way on our road. I will then propose: 5) Althusser's structuralism is a structuralism of *stasis*, departing from Marx's own historical method; 6) Hence Althusser's conceptual universe has no adequate categories to explain contradiction or change – or class struggle; 7) These critical weaknesses explain why Althusser must be silent (or evasive) as to other important categories, among them 'economic' and 'needs'; 8) From which it follows that Althusser (and his progeny) find themselves unable to handle, except in the most abstract and theoretic way, questions of value, culture – and political theory.

When these elementary propositions have been established (or, as Althusser will have it, 'proved') we may then stand back from the whole elaborate and sophisticated structure. We may even attempt another kind of 'reading' of his words. And, if we are not exhausted, we may propose some questions of a different kind: how has this extraordinary fracture occurred in the Marxist tradition? How are we to understand Althusserian structuralism, not in its self-evaluation as 'science', but as *ideology*? What were the specific conditions for the genesis and maturation of this ideology and its rapid replication in the West? And what is the political significance of this unmeasured assault upon historical materialism?

iii

I commence my argument at a manifest disadvantage. Few spectacles would be more ludicrous than that of an English historian – and, moreover, one manifestly self-incriminated of empirical practices – attempting to offer epistemological correction to a rigorous Parisian philosopher.

I can sense, as I stare at the paper before me, the shadowy faces of an expectant audience, scarcely able to conceal their rising mirth. I don't intend to gratify them. I don't understand Althusser's propositions as to the relation between the 'real world' and 'knowledge', and therefore I can't expose myself in a discussion of them.

It's true that I've *tried* to understand them. Throughout *For Marx* the question as to how these 'raw materials' from the real world arrive in the laboratory of theoretical practice (to be processed according to Generalities I, II and III) cries out for some answer. But the opportunity for disclosure is passed by. Turning to *Reading Capital* we learn, with rising excitement, that now, at last, an answer will be given. Instead, we are offered anti-climax. We first endure some tedium and more exasperation, as a ritual commination against 'empiricism' is conducted; even a mind without philosophic rigour cannot overlook the fact that Althusser continually confuses and conflates the empirical mode (or techniques) of investigation with the quite different ideological formation, *empiricism*, and moreover, simplifies his own polemics by caricaturing even this 'empiricism', and ascribing to it, indiscriminately and erroneously, 'essentialist' procedures of abstraction.⁵ But at length, after fifty pages, we arrive at – what?

We can say, then, that the mechanism of production of the knowledge effect lies in the mechanism which underlies the action of the forms of order in the scientific discourse of the proof. (R.C. 67)

Thirty-three words. And then silence.

If I understand these words, then I find them disgraceful. For we have been led all this way only to be offered a re-statement,

in new terms, of the original question. Knowledge effects arrive, in the form of 'raw materials' (Generalities I, which are already artefacts of culture, with more or less ideological impurity), obediently as 'the scientific discourse of the proof' demands. I must explain my objection: and, first, what my objection is *not*.

I don't object to the fact that Althusser offers no 'guarantees' as to an identity between the 'real' object and its conceptual representation. One would expect any such formal guarantee to be of doubtful efficacy: even a casual acquaintance with philosophy suggests that such guarantees have a short term of validity and contain many clauses in small print which exonerate the guarantor from liability. Nor do I object to the fact that Althusser has abandoned the weary ground of attempting to elucidate a one-to-one correspondence between this 'real' material event or object and that perception/intuition/sense-impression/concept. It would, perhaps, have been more honest if he had frankly confessed that, in doing so, he was also abandoning certain of Lenin's propositions in *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* – but for the least syllable of Lenin he professes a religious awe.⁶ And he certainly might have confessed that, in shifting his ground, he was *following* and not setting philosophical fashion.

In the old days (one supposes) when the philosopher, labouring by lamp-light in his study, came to this point in his argument, he set down his pen, and looked around for an object in the real world to interrogate. Very commonly that object was the nearest one to hand: his writing-table. 'Table,' he said, 'how do I know that you exist, and, if you do, how do I know that my concept, table, represents your real existence?' The table would look back without blinking, and interrogate the philosopher in its turn. It was an exacting exchange, and according to which one was the victor in the confrontation, the philosopher would inscribe himself as idealist or a materialist. Or so one must suppose from the frequency with which tables appear. Today the philosopher interrogates instead the word: a pre-given linguistic artefact, with an indistinct social genesis and *with a history*.

And here I begin to find terms for my objection. It is, first, that Althusser interrogates this word (or this 'raw material' or this 'knowledge effect') too briefly. It exists only to be worked up by theoretical practice (Generality II) to structural conceptualisation or concrete knowledge (Generality III). Althusser is as curt with linguistics and with the sociology of knowledge as he is with history or anthropology. His raw material (object of knowledge) is an inert, pliant kind of stuff, with neither inertia nor energies of its own, awaiting passively its manufacture into knowledge. It may contain gross ideological impurities, to be sure, but these may be purged in the alembic of theoretical practice.

Second, this raw material appears to present itself for processing as discrete mental events ('facts', *idées reçues*, commonplace concepts): and it also presents itself with discretion. Now I don't wish to jest with the very serious difficulties encountered by philosophers in this critical epistemological area. Since every philosopher encounters them I must believe that these difficulties are indeed immense. And, at this level, I can hope to add nothing to their clarification. But a historian in the Marxist tradition is entitled to remind a Marxist philosopher that historians also are concerned, every day, in their practice, with the formation of, and with the tensions within, social consciousness. Our observation is rarely singular: this object of knowledge, this event, this elaborated concept. Our concern, more commonly, is with multiple evidences, whose inter-relationship is, indeed, an object of our enquiry. Or, if we isolate that singular evidence for particular scrutiny, that evidence does not stand compliantly like a table for interrogation: it stirs, in the medium of time, before our eyes. These stirrings, these events, if they are within 'social being' seem often to impinge upon, thrust into, break against, existent social consciousness. They propose new problems, and, above all, they continually give rise to *experience* – a category which, however imperfect it may be, is indispensable to the historian, since it comprises the mental and emotional response, whether of an individual or of a social group, to many inter-related

events or to many repetitions of the same kind of event.

It may perhaps be argued that experience is a very low level of mentation indeed: that it can produce no more than the grossest 'common sense', ideologically-contaminated 'raw material', scarcely qualifying to enter the laboratory of Generalities I. I don't think that this is so; on the contrary, I consider that the supposition that this is so is a very characteristic delusion of intellectuals, who suppose that ordinary mortals are stupid. In my own view, the truth is more nuanced: experience is valid and effective but within determined limits: the farmer 'knows' his seasons, the sailor 'knows' his seas, but both may remain mystified about kingship and cosmology.

But the point immediately before us is not the limits of experience, but the manner of its arrival or production. Experience arises spontaneously within social being, but it does not arise without thought; it arises because men and women (and not only philosophers) are rational, and they think about what is happening to themselves and their world. If we are to employ the (difficult) notion that social being determines social consciousness, how are we to suppose that this is so? It will surely not be supposed that 'being' is here, as gross materiality from which all ideality has been abstracted, and that 'consciousness' (as abstract ideality) is there? For we cannot conceive of any form of social being independently of its organising concepts and expectations, nor could social being reproduce itself for a day without thought. What we mean is that changes take place within social being, which give rise to changed *experience*: and this experience is *determining*, in the sense that it exerts pressures upon existent social consciousness, proposes new questions, and affords much of the material which the more elaborated intellectual exercises are about.⁸ Experience, one supposes, constitutes some part of the raw material which is offered up to the procedures of the scientific discourse of the proof. Indeed, some intellectual practitioners have suffered experiences themselves.

Experience, then, does not arrive obediently in the way that Althusser proposes. One suspects that some very aetiolated

notion of knowledge is here. He has offered to us less an epistemology which takes into account the actual formative motions of consciousness than a description of certain procedures of academic life. He has abandoned the lamp-lit study and broken off the dialogue with an exhausted table: he is now within the emplacements of the *École Normale Supérieure*. The data have arrived, obediently processed by graduates and research assistants at a rather low level of conceptual development (G I), they have been interrogated and sorted into categories by a rigorous seminar of aspirant professors (G II), and the G III is about to ascend the rostrum and propound the conclusions of concrete knowledge.

But outside the university precincts another kind of knowledge-production is going on all the time. I will agree that it is not always rigorous. I am not careless of intellectual values nor unaware of the difficulty of their attainment. But I must remind a Marxist philosopher that knowledges have been and still are formed outside the academic procedures. Nor have these been, in the test of practice, negligible. They have assisted men and women to till the fields, to construct houses, to support elaborate social organisations, and even, on occasion, to challenge effectively the conclusions of academic thought.

Nor is this all. Althusser's account also leaves out the thrusting-forth of the 'real world', spontaneously and not at all decorously, proposing hitherto unarticulated questions to philosophers. Experience does not wait discreetly outside their offices, waiting for the moment at which the discourse of the proof will summon it into attendance. Experience walks in without knocking at the door, and announces deaths, crises of subsistence, trench warfare, unemployment, inflation, genocide. People starve: their survivors think in new ways about the market. People are imprisoned: in prison they meditate in new ways about the law. In the face of such general experiences old conceptual systems may crumble and new problematics insist upon their presence. Such imperative presentation of knowledge effects is not allowed for in Althusser's epistemology, which is that of a recipient – a manufacturer who is not

concerned with the genesis of his raw material so long as it arrives to time.

What Althusser overlooks is the *dialogue* between social being and social consciousness. Obviously, this dialogue goes in both directions. If social being is not an inert table which cannot refute a philosopher with its legs, then neither is social consciousness a passive recipient of 'reflections' of that table. Obviously, consciousness, whether as unselfconscious culture, or as myth, or as science, or law, or articulated ideology, thrusts back into being in its turn: as being is thought so thought also is lived – people may, within limits, *live* the social or sexual expectations which are imposed upon them by dominant conceptual categories.

It had been habitual among Marxists – indeed, it had once been thought to be a distinguishing methodological priority of Marxism – to stress the determining pressures of being upon consciousness; although in recent years much 'Western Marxism' has tilted the dialogue heavily back towards ideological domination. This difficult question, which many of us have often addressed, may be left aside for the moment; it is in any case a question more usefully resolved by historical and cultural analysis than by theoretical pronouncements. If I have stressed the first party in the dialogue rather than the second, it is because Althusser has almost nothing to say about it – and refuses to attend to the accounts of historians or anthropologists who have. His silence here is both a guilty one and one necessary to his purpose. It is a consequence of his prior determination to wall up the least aperture through which 'empiricism' might enter.

iv

Let us resume. Althusser's 'epistemology' is founded upon an account of theoretical procedures which is at every point derivative not only from academic intellectual disciplines but from *one* (and at the most three) highly-specialised disciplines.⁹ The discipline is, of course, his own: philosophy: but of a particular

Cartesian tradition of logical exegesis, marked at its origin by the pressures of Catholic theology, modified by the monism of Spinoza (whose influence saturates Althusser's work¹⁰), and marked at its conclusion by a particular Parisian dialogue between phenomenology, existentialism and Marxism. Thus the procedures from which an 'epistemology' is derived are not those of 'philosophy' in general, but of one particular moment of its presence. There is no reason why philosophers should necessarily identify their own procedures with those of every other kind of knowledge-production: and many have been at pains to make distinctions. It is an elementary confusion, a function of academic imperialism, and it is a tendency rather easy to correct. And it has been, very often, so corrected.

But not by Althusser. On the contrary, he makes a virtue of his own theoretical imperialism. The peculiarity of certain branches of philosophy and of mathematics is that these are, to an unusual degree, self-enclosed and self-replicating: logic and quantity examine their own materials, their own procedures. This Althusser offers as a paradigm of the very procedures of *Theory*: G II (theoretical practice) works upon G I to produce G III. The potential 'truth' of the materials in G I, despite all ideological impurities, is guaranteed by a hidden Spinozan monism (*idea vera debet cum suo ideato convenire*): a true idea must agree with its original in nature, or, in Althusserian terms, G I would not present itself if it did not correspond to the 'real.' It is the business of the scientific procedures of G II to purify G I of ideological admixture, and to produce *knowledge* (G III), which, in its own theoretical consistency, contains its own guarantees (*veritas norma sui et falsi* – truth is the criterion both of itself and of falsehood). In a brief aside Althusser allows that G II may, in certain disciplines, follow somewhat different procedures: the discourse of the proof may even be conducted in the form of experiment. This is his only concession: Generality II (he admits) 'deserves a much more serious examination than I can embark upon here.'¹¹ And so it does. For such an examination, if scrupulously conducted, would have exposed to view Althusser's continuous, wilful and theoretically-crucial

confusion between 'empiricism' (that is, philosophical positivism and all its kin) and the empirical mode of intellectual practice.

This question lies close to the question of 'historicism' (a matter in which I have my own declared interest), and so I cannot despatch it so quickly. Generalities I include those mental events which are generally called 'facts' or 'evidence.' 'Contrary to the ideological illusions . . . of empiricism or sensualism' (Althusser tells us) these 'facts' are not singular or concrete: they are already 'concepts . . . of an ideological nature.' (FM. 183-4) The work of any science¹² consists in '*Elaborating its own scientific facts* through a critique of the ideological "*facts*" elaborated by an earlier ideological theoretical practice':

To elaborate its own specific 'facts' is simultaneously to elaborate its own 'theory', since a scientific fact – and not the self-styled pure phenomenon – can only be identified in the field of a theoretical practice. (FM. 184)

This work of '*elaborating its own facts*' out of the raw material of pre-existent ideological concepts is done by Generality II, which is the working body of concepts and procedures of the discipline in question. That there are 'difficulties' in the mode of operation of G II is acknowledged, but these difficulties are left unexamined ('we must rest content with these schematic gestures and not enter into the dialectic of this theoretical labour'. (FM. 185))

This is wise, since the difficulties are substantial. One of them is this: how does knowledge ever change or advance? If the raw material, or the evidence (G I), which is presented to a science (G II) is already fixed within a given ideological field – and if G I is the *only* route (however shadowy) by which the world of material and social reality can effect an entry (a shame-faced, ideological entry) into the laboratories of Theory, then it is not possible to understand by what means G II can effect any relevant or realistic critique of the ideological impurities

presented to it. In short, Althusser's schema either show us how ideological illusions can reproduce themselves endlessly (or may evolve in aberrant or fortuitous ways); or it proposes (with Spinoza) that theoretical procedures *in themselves* can refine ideological impurities out of their given materials by no other means than the scientific discourse of the proof; or, finally, it proposes some ever-pre-given immanent Marxist Idea outside the material and social world (of which Idea this world is an 'effect'). Althusser argues by turns the second and the third proposition, although his work is in fact a demonstration of the first.

But we may leave this difficulty aside, since it would be unkind to interrogate too strictly a Generality which has only been offered to us with 'schematic gestures.' It is possible that Althusser is describing procedures appropriate to certain kinds of exercise in logic: we examine (let us say) a passage of text from Rousseau (G I): the uses of the words and the consistency of the logic is scrutinised according to rigorous philosophical or critical procedures (G II): and we arrive at a 'knowledge' (G III), which may be a useful knowledge (and, within the terms of its own discipline, 'true'), but which is critical rather than substantive. To confuse these procedures (appropriate within their own limits) with all procedures of knowledge production is the kind of elementary error which (one would suppose) could be committed only by students early in their careers, habituated to attending seminars in textual criticism of this kind, and apprentices rather than practitioners of their discipline. They have not yet arrived at those other (and equally difficult) procedures of research, experiment, and of the intellectual appropriation of the real world, without which the secondary (but important) critical procedures would have neither meaning nor existence.

In by far the greatest area of knowledge production a very different kind of dialogue is going on. It is untrue that the evidence or 'facts' under investigation, always arrive (as G I) already in an ideological form. In the experimental sciences there are extremely elaborate procedures, appropriate to each

discipline, intended to ensure that they do not. (This is not, of course, to argue that scientific facts 'disclose' their own 'meanings' independently of conceptual organisation.) It is central to every other applied discipline (in the 'social sciences' and 'humanities') that similar procedures are elaborated, although these are necessarily less exact and more subject to ideological determinations. The difference between a mature intellectual discipline and a merely-ideological formation (theology, astrology, some parts of bourgeois sociology and of orthodox Stalinist Marxism – and perhaps Althusserian structuralism) lies exactly in these procedures and controls; for, if the object of knowledge consisted only in ideological 'facts' elaborated by that discipline's own procedures, then there would never be any way of validating or of falsifying any proposition: there could be no scientific or disciplinary court of appeal.

The absurdity of Althusser consists in the idealist mode of his theoretical constructions. His thought is the child of economic determinism ravished by theoreticist idealism. It posits (but does not attempt to 'prove' or 'guarantee') the existence of material reality: we will accept this point. It posits also the existence of a material ('external') world of social reality, whose determinate organisation is always in the last instance 'economic': the proof for this lies not in Althusser's work – nor would it be reasonable to ask for such proof in the work of a philosopher – but in the mature work of Marx. This work arrives ready-made at the commencement of Althusser's enquiry, as a concrete knowledge, albeit a knowledge not always aware of its own theoretical practice. It is Althusser's business to enhance its own self-knowledge, as well as to repel various hideous ideological impurities which have grown up within the silences of its interstices. Thus a given knowledge (Marx's work) informs Althusser's procedures at each of the three levels of his hierarchy: Marx's work arrives as 'raw material' – however elaborate – at G I; it is interrogated and processed (G II) according to principles of 'science' derived from its mature *aperçus*, unstated assumptions, implicit methodologies, etc.; and the outcome is to confirm and reinforce the concrete knowledge

(G III) which approved portions of Marx's work already announce.

It scarcely seems necessary to insist that this procedure is wholly self-confirming. It moves within the circle not only of its own problematic but of its own self-perpetuating and self-elaborating procedures. This is (in the eyes of Althusser and his followers) exactly the virtue of this theoretical practice. It is a sealed system within which concepts endlessly circulate, recognise and interrogate each other, and the intensity of its repetitious introversial life is mistaken for a 'science.' This 'science' is then projected back upon Marx's work: it is proposed that his own procedures were of the same order: and that after the miracle of the 'epistemological break' (an immaculate conception which required no gross empirical impregnation) all followed in terms of the elaboration of thought and its structural organisation.

May I sum up all this in one sentence? This sentence describes a circle: a philosophic reading of *Capital* is only possible as the application of that which is the very object of our investigation, Marxist philosophy. This circle is only epistemologically possible because of the existence of Marx's philosophy in the works of Marxism. (R.C. 34)

To facilitate the 'discourse of the proof' we return to some passages of Marx, but now as raw material (G I): the hand is held over all Marx's 'immature' work, nearly all of the work of Engels, those portions of Marx's mature work which exemplify the practice of historical materialism, the correspondence of Marx and Engels (which take us directly into their laboratory and show us their procedures), and the greater part of *Capital* itself ('illustrations'); but between the fingers of the hand one is allowed to peep at de-contexted phrases of Marx, at 'silences', and at sub-articulate mediations, which are chastised and disciplined until they confirm the self-sufficiency of theoretical practice. Of course. If the questions are proposed in this way, and if the material is called out – already drilled in its responses, and permitted to answer these questions and no others – then

we can expect it to offer to the interrogator a dutiful allegiance.

This mode of thought is *exactly* what has commonly been designated, in the Marxist tradition, as idealism. Such idealism consists, not in the positing or denial of the primacy of an ulterior material world, but in a self-generating conceptual universe which imposes its own ideality upon the phenomena of material and social existence, rather than engaging in continual dialogue with these. If there is a 'Marxism' of the contemporary world which Marx or Engels would have recognised instantly as an idealism, Althusserian structuralism is this.¹³ The category has attained to a primacy over its material referent; the conceptual structure hangs above and dominates social being.

v

I don't propose to counter Althusser's paradigm of knowledge-production with an alternative, universal, paradigm of my own. But I will follow him a little further into my own discipline. It is not easy to do this with an even temper, since his repeated references to history and to 'historicism' display his theoretical imperialism in its most arrogant forms. His comments display throughout no acquaintance with, nor understanding of, historical procedures: that is, procedures which make of 'history' a *discipline* and not a babble of alternating ideological assertions: procedures which provide for their own relevant discourse of the proof.

However, let us be cool. Let us approach this problem, not from the suburbs (what historians *think* that they are doing when they consult and argue about 'evidence'), but at the citadel itself: Althusser's notion of Theory. If we can storm that aloof, castellated (and preposterous) imperial citadel, then we will save our energies from skirmishes in the surrounding terrain. The land will fall into our hand.

History (Althusser tells us) 'hardly exists other than . . . as the 'application' of a theory . . . which does not exist in any real sense.' The 'applications' of the theory of history somehow occur behind this absent theory's back and are naturally

mistaken for it.' This 'absent theory' depends upon 'more or less ideological outlines of theories':

We must take seriously *the fact that the theory of history, in the strong sense, does not exist*, or hardly exists so far as historians are concerned, that the concepts of existing history are therefore nearly always 'empirical' concepts, more or less in search of their theoretical basis – 'empirical', i.e. cross-bred with a powerful strain of an ideology concealed behind its "obviousness." This is the case with the best historians, who can be distinguished from the rest precisely by their concern for theory, but who seek this theory at a level on which it cannot be found, at the level of historical *methodology*, which cannot be defined without the *theory* on which it is based. (R.C. 110)

We will pause for a moment to note one oddity. There has existed for fifty years or more (very much more if we remember Engels and Marx) a Marxist historiography, which, as I have already remarked, now has an international presence. It is curious, then, that all these historians (who might, one supposes, include one or two whom Althusser would nominate as among 'the best') have been operating through all these decades without any theory. For they had supposed that their theory was, exactly, derivative in some part from Marx; or from what Althusser would designate as Theory. That is, the critical concepts employed by these historians every day in their practice included those of exploitation, class struggle, class, determinism, ideology, and of feudalism and capitalism as modes of production, etc., etc., – concepts derived from and validated within a Marxist theoretical tradition.

So this is odd. Historians have no theory. Marxist historians have no theory either. Historical Theory, then, must be something different from Marxist historical theory.

But let us resume our survey of the citadel. We must climb crag after crag before we attain the summit. Theory cannot be found 'at the level' of historical practice, whether Marxist or not. *Excelsior!*

The truth of history cannot be read in its manifest discourse, because the text of history is not a text in which a voice (the Logos) speaks, but

the inaudible and illegible notation of the effects of a structure of structures. (R.C. 17)

Not many historians suppose that the 'manifest discourse' of history voluntarily discloses some 'truth', nor that the Logos is whispering in their ears. But even so, Althusser's pat antithesis is somehow awry. 'Inaudible and illegible'? Not wholly so. 'Notation of the effects'? Perhaps: as a metaphor we might let this pass: but is it not a metaphor which leads precisely to that notion of the abstraction of an essence 'from the real which contains it and keeps it in hiding' which Althusser, in a different mood, castigates as the hall-mark of 'empiricism'? (See R.C. 35-37) 'Of the effects of a structure of structures'? Where, then, is this 'structure of structures' situated, if it is subject to no 'empirical' investigation and also (we recall) lies outside the 'level' of historical methodology? If we may ask a vulgar question: is this 'structure of structures' *there*, immersed in history's happenings, or is it somewhere outside: for example, a Logos which speaks, not from the text of history, but out of some philosophical head?

The question is irrelevant, says Althusser: worse, it is improper: it is guilty: it arises from a bourgeois and empiricist problematic. To say that structure could be disclosed by procedures of historical investigation is meaningless because all that we can ever know of history are certain conceptual representations: impure Generalities I. Hence historical 'truth' can be disclosed only within theory itself, by theoretical procedures ('the process that produces the concrete-knowledge takes place wholly in the theoretical practice') (FM. 186). The formal rigour of these procedures is the only proof of the 'truth' of this knowledge, and of its correspondence to 'real' phenomena: concrete knowledge, thus established, carries with it all 'guarantees' that are necessary – or that can ever be obtained. 'History itself is not temporality, but an epistemological category designating the object of a certain science, historical materialism.'¹⁴ 'The knowledge of history is no more historical than the knowledge of sugar is sweet.' (R.C. 106)

This ultimate ascent to the citadel is defended by an idealist netting of assertions so densely-textured as to be almost impenetrable. We may construct our knowledge of history only '*within knowledge*, in the process of knowledge, not in the development of the real-concrete.' (R.C. 108) And, of course, since everything that we think takes place within thought and its symbols, codes and representations, this is a truism. What occasions surprise is that it was possible for a philosopher, in the late 1960s, to re-iterate such truisms, with such rhetorical fury, with such severe castigation of (always-unidentified) opponents, and with such an assumption of novelty. But the rhetoric and the postures of severity are not 'innocent': they are devices to carry the reader from such truisms to the very different proposition that knowledge emerges *wholly* within thought, by means of its own theoretical self-extrapolation. Thus in one elision it is possible to dismiss both the question of *experience* (how G I are presented to theory) and the question of specific procedures of investigation (experimental or other) which constitute that empirical 'dialogue' which I will shortly consider. Thus Althusser:

Once they are truly constituted and developed¹⁵ [the sciences] have no need for verification from *external* practices to declare the knowledges they produce to be "true", i.e. to be *knowledges*. No mathematician in the world waits until physics has *verified* a theorem to declare it proved. . . The truth of his theorem is a hundred per cent provided by criteria purely *internal* to the practice of mathematical proof, hence by the *criterion of mathematical practice*, i.e. by the forms required by existing mathematical scientificity. We can say the same for the results of every science. . . (R.C. 59)

Can we indeed? Once again, Althusser falls back upon a discipline which, insofar as it contemplates the logic of its own materials, is a special case: the notion that mathematics could serve as a paradigm, not only for logic, but for the production of knowledge, has haunted the Cartesian tradition, not least in the heretic thought of Spinoza. And Althusser goes on to declare, triumphantly:

We should say the same of the science which concerns us most particularly: historical materialism. It has been possible to apply Marx's theory with success because it is 'true'; it is not true because it has been applied with success. (R.C. 59)

The statement provides its own premise: *because* Marx's theory is true (undemonstrated) it has been applied with success. True theories usually can be so applied. But how are we to determine this success? Within the historical discipline? And what about those occasions when Marx's theories have been applied *without* success? If we were to propose this statement in this form: 'It has been possible to apply Marx's theory with success insofar as the theory has been 'true': where the theory has been successful it has confirmed the theory's truth,' then we would find ourselves within a different epistemological discourse.

To resume. Althusser allows, in a perfunctory clause (this is evidently a matter at a very low level of theory indeed) that 'no doubt there is a relation between *thought-about-the-real* and this *real*, but it is a relation of *knowledge*, a relation of adequacy or inadequacy of knowledge, not a real relation, meaning by this a relation inscribed in *that real* of which the thought is the (adequate or inadequate) knowledge':

This knowledge relation between knowledge of the real and the real is not a relation of *the real* that is known in the relationship. The distinction between a relation of knowledge and a relation of the real is a fundamental one: if we did not respect it we should fall irreversibly into either speculative idealism if, with Hegel, we confused thought and the real by reducing the real to thought, by 'conceiving the real as the result of thought. . .'; into empiricist idealism if we confused thought with the real by reducing thought about the real to the real itself. (R.C. 87)

I do not pretend to understand this very well. It would not occur to me to define the relation between knowledge and its real object in terms of a 'relationship' to which there were two *active* parties – the 'real', as it were, attempting actively to disclose itself to the recipient mind. The real, however active in its other manifestations, is epistemologically null or inert: that is, it can

become an object of epistemological enquiry only at the point where it enters within the field of perception or knowledge. In Caudwell's words, 'object and subject, as exhibited by the mind relation, come into being simultaneously', and 'knowing is a mutually determining relation between knowing and being.'¹⁶ There can be no means of deciding the 'adequacy or inadequacy' of *knowledge* (as against the special cases of logic, mathematics, etc.) unless one supposes procedures (a 'dialogue' of practice) devised to establish the correspondence of this knowledge to properties 'inscribed in' that real.

Once again, Althusser has jumped from a truism to theoreticist solipsism. He has approached the problem with a commonplace assertion which presents no difficulties:

Thought about the real, the conception of the real, and all the operations of thought by which the real is thought or conceived, belong to the order of thought, the elements of thought, which must not be confused with the order of the real. (R.C. 87)

Where else could thought take place? But the 'knowledge relation between knowledge of the real and the real' can still perfectly well be a real, and determining, relation: that is, a relation of the active appropriation by one party (thought) of the other party (selective attributes of the real), and this relation may take place *not on any terms which thought prescribes* but in ways which are determined by the properties of the real object: the properties of reality determine both the appropriate procedures of thought (that is, their 'adequacy or inadequacy') and its product. Herein consists the dialogue between consciousness and being.

I will give an illustration. . . and, aha! I see my table. To be an object, to be 'null or inert', does not remove that object from being a determining party within a subject-object relation. No piece of timber has ever been known to make itself into a table: no joiner has ever been known to make a table out of air, or sawdust. The joiner appropriates that timber, and, in working it up into a table, he is governed both by his skill (theoretical

practice, itself arising from a *history*, or 'experience', of making tables, as well as a history of the evolution of appropriate tools) and by the qualities (size, grain, seasoning, etc.) of the timber itself. The wood imposes its properties and its 'logic' upon the joiner as the joiner imposes his tools, skills and his ideal conception of tables upon the wood.

This illustration may tell us little about the relation between thought and its object, since thought is not a joiner, nor is it engaged in this kind of manufacturing process. But it may serve to emphasise one possible form of relation between an active subject and an 'inert' object, wherein the object remains (within limits) determinant: the wood cannot determine *what* is made, nor whether it is made well or badly, but it can certainly determine what can *not* be made, the limits (size, strength, etc.) of what is made, and the skills and tools appropriate to the making. In such an equation 'thought' (if it is 'true') can only represent what is appropriate to the determined properties of its real object, and must operate within this determined field. If it breaks free, then it becomes engaged in freakish speculative botching, and the self-extrapolation of a 'knowledge' of tables out of pre-existent bigotry. Since this 'knowledge' does not correspond to the reality of the wood, it will very soon demonstrate its own 'adequacy or inadequacy'; as soon as we sit down at it, it is likely to collapse, spilling its whole load of elaborate epistemological sauces to the floor.

The real object (I have said) is epistemologically inert: that is, it cannot impose or disclose itself to knowledge: all that takes place within thought and its procedures. But this does not mean that it is inert in other ways: it need by no means be sociologically or ideologically inert. And, to cap all, the real is not 'out there' and thought within the quiet lecture-theatre of our heads, 'inside here.' Thought and being inhabit a single space, which space is ourselves. Even as we think we also hunger and hate, we sicken or we love, and consciousness is intermixed with being; even as we contemplate the 'real' we experience our own palpable reality. So that the problems which the 'raw materials' present to thought often consist exactly in their very active,

indicative, intrusive qualities. For the dialogue between consciousness and being becomes increasingly complex – indeed, it attains at once to a different *order* of complexity, which presents a different *order* of epistemological problems – when the critical consciousness is acting upon a raw material made up of its own kind of stuff: intellectual artefacts, social relationships, the historical event.

A historian – certainly a Marxist historian – should be well aware of this. That dead, inert text of his evidence is by no means 'inaudible'; it has a deafening vitality of its own; voices clamour from the past, asserting their own meanings, appearing to disclose their own self-knowledge as knowledge. If we offer a commonplace 'fact' – 'King Zed died in 1100 A.D.' – we are already offered a concept of kingship: the relations of domination and subordination, the functions and role of the office, the charisma and magical endowments attaching to that role, etc.; and we are presented with these not only as an object of investigation, a concept which performed certain functions in mediating relationships in a given society, with (perhaps) several conflicting notations of this concept endorsed by different social groups (the priests, the serving-girls) within that society – not only this, which the historian has to recover with difficulty, but also this evidence is received by the historian within a theoretical framework (the discipline of history, which itself has a history and a disputed present) which has refined the concept of kingship, from the study of many examples of kingship in very different societies, resulting in concepts of kingship very different from the immediacy, in power, in common-sense, or in myth, of those who actually witnessed King Zed die.

These difficulties are immense. But the difficulties are multiplied many times over when we are considering not one event or concept (kingship) but those events which most historians regard as central to their study: historical 'process', the inter-relationship between disparate phenomena (as economies and ideologies), causation. The relationship between thought and its object now becomes so exceedingly complex and mediated;

and, moreover, the resulting historical knowledge establishes relations between phenomena which could never be seen, felt or experienced by the actors in these ways at the time, and it organises the findings according to concepts and within categories which were unknown to the women and men whose actions make up the object of study – all these difficulties are so immense that it becomes apparent that ‘real’ history and historical knowledge are things totally distinct. And so of course they are. What else could they be? But does it thereby follow that we must cut down the bridge between them? May not the object (real history) still stand in an ‘objective’ (empirically-verifiable) relationship to its knowledge, and a relationship which is (within limits) determinant?

In the face of the complexities of such a conclusion, a certain kind of rational mind (and, in particular, a rational mind innocent of practical knowledge of historical procedures, and impatient for an easy route to the Absolute) recoils. This recoil can take many forms. It is of interest (and it ought to be of interest to Marxists) that, at the initial stage of the recoil, both empiricism and Althusserian structuralism arrive at an identical repudiation of ‘historicism.’ So far from Althusser’s positions being original, they signify a capitulation to decades of conventional academic criticism of historiography, whose outcome has sometimes been relativist (‘history’ as an expression of the pre-occupations of the present), sometimes idealist and theoreticist, and sometimes one of extreme radical scepticism as to history’s epistemological credentials. One route may have been through Husserl and Heidegger: another through Hegel and Lukács: another through a more ‘empirical’ tradition of ‘Anglo-Saxon’ linguistic philosophy: but all routes have led to a common terminus.

At the end of his working life it was possible for that formidable practitioner of historical materialism, Marc Bloch, to assume with robust confidence the objective and determinant character of his materials: ‘The past is, by definition, a datum which nothing in the future will change.’¹⁷ By the 1960s no such confidence might be expressed in respectable intellectual

company; it was possible for a gifted writer within the Marxist tradition to assume historical relativism as a commonplace:

For the human sciences, the historical individuality is constructed by the choice of what is essential *for us*, i.e. in terms of our value-judgements. Thus, historical reality changes from epoch to epoch with modifications in the hierarchy of values.¹⁸

The particular reasons proposed for history’s epistemological lack of credibility have been different: as have been the proffered solutions: but Oakeshott and Althusser, Lucien Goldmann and Raymond Aron, Popper and Hindess/Hirst have all been loitering in the same area with similar intent.¹⁹

‘History’ had perhaps called down this revenge upon itself. I don’t mean to deny that the nineteenth and twentieth centuries engendered authentic and sometimes monstrous ‘historicisms’ (evolutionary, teleological, and essentialist notions of ‘history’s’ self-motivation); nor to deny that this same historicism permeated some part of the Marxist tradition, in the notion of a *programmed* succession of historical ‘stages’, motored towards a pre-determined end by class struggle. All this merited severe correction. But the correction administered to historical materialism too often assumed its guilt without scrupulous enquiry into its practice; or, if examples of guilt were identified (often in the work of ideologues rather than in the mature practice of historians), it was then assumed that these invalidated the whole exercise, rather than calling in question the practitioner, or the maturity of historical knowledge. And if critics and philosophers (Collingwood apart) were rather generally guilty of this convenient elision, no-one has been more outrageous in his attribution of ‘historicism’ to the practice of historical materialism than Althusser: from start to finish the practice of historians (and of Marxist historians) is assumed by him but not examined.

Let us return the scrutiny of criticism back upon the critics, and see how Althusser and Popper came to a common rejection of ‘historicism.’ For Popper there is a very limited sense in

which he will allow that certain 'facts' of history are empirically verifiable. But once we step across a shadowy (but critical) border from discrete facts or particular evidences to questions of process, social formations and relationships, or causation, we instantly enter a realm in which we must either be guilty of 'historicism' (which consists, for him, in part in attributing to history predictive laws, or in propounding 'general interpretations', which arise from improper 'holistic' categories imposed by the interpreting mind, which are empirically unverifiable, and which we smuggle into history ourselves) or we are avowedly offering an interpretation as a 'point of view.' The discrete facts are in any case contaminated by their random or preselected provenance. Evidence about the past either survives in arbitrary ways or in ways which impose a particular presupposition on the historical investigator, and since –

The so-called 'sources' of history only record such facts as appeared sufficiently interesting to record. . . the sources will, as a rule, contain only facts that fit in with a pre-conceived theory. And since no further facts are available, it will not, as a rule, be possible to test that or any other subsequent theory.

Most interpretations will be 'circular in the sense that they must fit in with that interpretation which was used in the original selection of the facts.' Hence historical knowledge, in any large or general sense, is its own artefact. While Popper allows that an interpretation may be *disproved*, because it does not correspond with empirically-ascertainable discrete facts (an allowance which Althusser cannot make), by his criteria of proof – criteria derived from the natural sciences – we can go no further. The experimental proof of any interpretation is impossible: hence interpretation belongs to a category outside of historical knowledge ('point of view'); although each generation has a right, and even a 'pressing need', to offer its own interpretation or point of view as a contribution to its own self-understanding and self-evaluation.²⁰

Thus Popper: we cannot know 'history', or at best we may

know only discrete facts (and these ones which happen to have survived through their own or historical self-selection). Interpretation consists in the introduction of a point of view: this may be legitimate (on other grounds) but it does not constitute any true historical knowledge. Althusser sets out from much the same premise:²¹ although the suggestion that we can know even discrete facts encounters his scorn, since no fact can attain to epistemological identity (or the significance of any meaning) until it is placed within a theoretical (or ideological) field: and the theoretical act is prior to and informs whatever is pretended as 'empirical' investigation.

In Althusser's schema, ideology (or Theory) take on the functions offered by Popper as interpretation or point of view. It is only in their conclusions that we find any marked disagreement. For Popper 'there is no history of mankind, there is only an indefinite number of histories of all kinds of aspects of human life.' These histories are created by historians out of an 'infinite subject matter' according to contemporary preoccupations.²² The emphasis falls with the monotony of a steam-hammer upon the unknowability of any objective historical process and upon the dangers of 'historicist' attribution. We must grope out way backwards in an empiricist dusk, making out the dim facts at our feet, piece-meal and one at a time. But where Popper sees danger Althusser sees a splendid opportunity, a conceptual space, a vacancy inviting his imperial occupation. Historical process is unknowable as a real object: historical knowledge is the product of theory: theory *invents* history, either as ideology or as Theory ('science'). The only trouble is (we remember) that 'the theory of history, in the strong sense, does not exist.' But Althusser can provide this theory to historians. We have no need to grope in the dusk: we will leap, with one gigantic epistemological bound, from darkness to day.

We have already noted this astounding idealism. To be sure, idealism is something that Althusser is very stern, even prim, about. 'Speculative idealism' (he tells us) confuses thought and the real by reducing the real to thought, and by 'conceiving the

real as the result of thought.' Now Althusser does not, in so many words, make this superfluous gesture. (To deny explicitly the prior existence of a material world might even call down upon him some curious looks from the leaders of the P.C.F.) As a dutiful 'materialist', Althusser asserts that the real *does* exist, somewhere out there:

For us, the 'real' is not a *theoretical slogan*; the real is the real object that exists independently of its knowledge – but which can only be defined by its knowledge. In this second, theoretical, relation, the real is identical to the means of knowing it. . . (F.M. 246)

And, just so, over 350 years ago, a philosopher arguing from an opposite brief, declared:

For us, God is not a *theoretical slogan*; God is the First Cause who exists independently of our knowledge, etc.

– or, to be more precise, 'Certain it is that God worketh nothing in nature but by second causes.' The argument did not prevent Francis Bacon from being accused as a secret atheist, and Althusser should not be surprised at being accused of dissolving reality in an idealist fiction. For this pious and necessary gesture once made (as a kind of genetic *a priori*, an 'in the last instance' proviso), the 'real' is shuffled quickly off the scene. All that thought can know is thought – and pretty bad artefacts of thought at that, 'for the mind of man is. . . like an enchanted glass, full of superstition and imposture, if it be not delivered and reduced.'²³ Theory must now set that right.

Althusser does not so much confuse thought and the real as, by asserting the unknowability of the real, he confiscates reality of its determinant properties, thus reducing the real to Theory. This Theory lay immanent, awaiting Marx's epistemological break. And the knowledge then appropriated by Marx (although 'revealed' would be a better word) was determined in no way by its object. Historians have entirely misread *Capital*:

They did not see that history features in *Capital* as an object of theory, not as a real object, as an 'abstract' (conceptual) object and not as a

real-concrete object; and that the chapters in which Marx applies the first stages of a historical treatment either to the struggles to shorten the working day, or to primitive capitalist accumulation refer to the theory of history as their principle, to the construction of the concept of history and of its 'developed forms', of which the economic theory of the capitalist mode of production constitutes one determinate 'region'. (R.C. 117)

And again:

Despite appearances, Marx does not analyse any 'concrete society', not even England which he mentions constantly in Volume One, but the CAPITALIST MODE OF PRODUCTION and nothing else. . . We must not imagine that Marx is analysing the concrete situation in England when he discusses it. He only discusses it in order to 'illustrate' his (abstract) theory of the capitalist mode of production. (L. & P. 76)

Arrayed in this scarlet and furred gown of Theory, Althusser may now storm into every adjacent lecture-theatre, and, in the name of philosophy, denounce the incumbents and expropriate them of their poor defective disciplines which pretend to be knowledges. Before these disciplines may proceed at all, they must first sit before his rostrum and master his lessons:

In particular, the specialists who work in the domains of the 'Human Sciences' and of the Social Sciences (a smaller domain), i.e. economists, historians, sociologists, social psychologists, psychologists, historians of art and literature, or religious and other ideologies – and even linguists and psycho-analysts, all these specialists ought to know that they cannot produce truly scientific knowledges in their specializations unless they recognize the indispensability of the theory Marx founded. For it is, in principle, the theory which 'opens up' to scientific knowledge the 'continent' in which they work, in which they have so far only produced a few preliminary knowledges (linguistics, psycho-analysis) or a few elements or rudiments of knowledge (the occasional chapter of history, sociology, or economics) or illusions pure and simple, illegitimately called knowledges. (L. & P. 72)

No matter if the vassals in these continents or 'smaller domains' had supposed themselves to be Marxists already: they were imposters, and should perhaps now pay a double tribute to the

'theory which Marx founded' but which no-one, including (notably) Marx, understood before the annunciation of Althusser. As for my own poor, laborious, discipline of history, the expropriation of our petty principality (no doubt a very small domain indeed) is total:

We must once again purify our concept of the theory of history, and purify it radically, of any contamination by the obviousness of empirical history, since we know that this 'empirical history' is merely the bare face of the empiricist ideology of history. . . We must grasp in all its rigour the absolute necessity of liberating the theory of history from any compromise with 'empirical' temporality. (R.C. 105)

Above all, we must overthrow the 'incredible power' of a prejudice

Which is the basis for contemporary historicism and which would have us confuse the object of knowledge with the real object by attributing to the object of knowledge the same 'qualities' as the real object of which it is the knowledge. (R.C. 106)

It is clear that Althusser and his regiment of assistants intend to impose punitive taxation on this petty (and now subjugated) domain of history, and to visit our sins upon the heads of our children down to the third generation.

One stands astounded in this inverted world of absurdity. And yet its magic transfixes those minds which stray within, unless they come in under arms and under the discipline of criticism. ('Common sense' will do them no good: every visitor is searched at the frontier and stripped of that.) Enchanted minds move through humourless, visionary fields, negotiate imaginary obstacles, slay mythical monsters ('humanism', 'moralism'), perform tribal rites with the rehearsal of approved texts. There is drama: the initiates feel that they have something to do (they are developing a 'science') as they discover fresh 'silences' in Marx, and extrapolate further from the self-extrapolating reasons of Theory. And there is the greater drama of heretics and heresies, as pupils and disciples fall from the faith,

as rival prophets arise, and as sub- and post-Althusserianisms and derivative structuralisms (linguistic and semiotic) multiply. Of course: for it is exactly in conditions when a theory (or *a theology*) is subject to no empirical controls that disputes about the placing of one term lead on to theoretical parturition: the parturition of intellectual parthenogenesis.

So that is where we are. One more astonishing aberrant spectacle is added to the phantasmagoria of our time. It is a bad time for the rational mind to live: for a rational mind in the Marxist tradition it is a time that cannot be endured. For the real world also gesticulates at reason with its own inversions. Obscene contradictions manifest themselves, jest, and then vanish; the known and the unknown change places; even as we examine them, categories dissolve and change into their opposites. In the West a bourgeois soul yearns for a 'Marxism' to heal its own alienation; in the 'Communist' world a proclaimed 'socialist basis' gives rise to a 'superstructure' of orthodox Christian faith, corrupt materialism, Slav nationalism and Solzhenitsyn. In that world 'Marxism' performs the function of an 'Ideological State Apparatus', and Marxists are alienated, not in their self-identity, but in the contempt of the people. An old and arduous rational tradition breaks down into two parts: an arid academic scholasticism and a brutal pragmatism of power.

All this is not unprecedented. The world has gone through such changes of scene before. Such changes signal the solution (or by-passing) of some problems, the arrival of new problems, the death of old questions, the invisible presence of new and unstated questions all around us. 'Experience' – the experience of Fascism, Stalinism, racism, and of the contradictory phenomenon of working-class 'affluence' within sectors of capitalist economies – is breaking in and demanding that we reconstruct our categories. Once again we are witnessing 'social being' determining 'social consciousness', as experience impinges and presses upon thought: but this time it is not bourgeois ideology but the 'scientific' consciousness of Marxism which is breaking under the strain.

This is a time for reason to grit its teeth. As the world changes, we must learn to change our language and our terms. But we should never change these *without reason*.

vi

To reply to Althusser. I will deny myself the advantage of fighting this battle upon favourable terrain – that is, the terrain of Marx's and Engels' own writings. While in a contest on these terms almost every skirmish could be won (for, repeatedly, Marx and Engels, in the most specific terms, infer the reality of both process and structure 'inscribed in' history, affirm the objectivity of historical knowledge, and pillory 'idealist' modes of thought identical to those of Althusser) I refuse to conduct the argument on this terrain for three reasons. First, while each skirmish might be won, the battle would remain undecided: all that the retreating dogma needs to do is to 'read' Marx even more selectively, discover new silences, repudiate more texts.²⁴ Second, I have long ceased to be interested in the defence of Marxism as doctrine in this kind of way.²⁵ Third, although *I know these texts*, and perhaps even know how to 'read' them in a different way to Althusser's readings – that is, I know them as an apprentice and as a practitioner of historical materialism, have employed them in my practice for many years, have tested them, have been indebted to them, and have also, on occasion, discovered different kinds of 'silence' or inadequacy in them – although all this is true, I think that the time has gone by for this kind of textual exegesis.

In this point, and in this point only, I may approach to some agreement with Althusser. For either of us to point to a congruity between our positions and a particular text of Marx can prove nothing as to the validity of the proposition in question: it can only confirm a congruity. In one hundred years the intellectual universe has changed, and even those propositions of Marx which require neither revision nor elucidation were defined in a particular context, and very often in antagonism to particular and now-forgotten opponents; and in our

new context, and in the face of new and, perhaps, more subtle objections, these propositions must be thought through and stated once again. This is a familiar historical problem. Everything must be thought through once more: every term must sit for new examinations.

I must delay a little longer over some practical objections. While these present themselves instantly to any practising historian, a philosopher will no doubt find them trivial: they can be spirited off with an epistemological wand. But the objections should be mentioned. For the descriptions of historical procedures proposed by Popper or by Althusser do not correspond to what most historians *think* they are doing, or 'find' themselves to be doing in practice. One finds that some philosophers (and more sociologists) have a theoretic, but uninformed, notion of what historical 'sources' are. Thus one has little sense of self-recognition in the statement (Popper) that 'the so-called "sources" of history only record such facts as appeared sufficiently interesting to record'; nor in the statement (Hindess/Hirst), 'facts are never *given*; they are always produced.' Popper's statement appears to direct attention to the *intentionality* of the historical actors: historical evidence comprises only those records which these actors *intended* to transmit to posterity, and hence imposes their intentions as a heuristic rule upon the historian. Hindess and Hirst, who acknowledge themselves to be, in their epistemology, true Althusserians (although more rigorous than their master), shift attention from the genesis of evidence to its appropriation (within a particular theoretical field) by the historian, who 'produces' facts, out of something not 'given'.

Both statements are half-truths: which is to say, they are untrue. By far the greater part of historical evidence has survived for reasons quite unrelated to any intention of the actors to project an image of themselves to posterity: the records of administration, taxation, legislation, religious belief and practice, the accounts of temples or of monasteries, and the archaeological evidence of their sites. It may be true that the further back we press into the margins of recorded time, more

of the evidence becomes subject to Popper's attribution of intention. This is not, however, a property of the evidence which ancient historians and archaeologists have unaccountably overlooked. Indeed, when they consider the earliest Mayan glyphs or cuneiform inscriptions of ancient Babylonia, an important object of study is, precisely, the intentions of the recorders: and, through this, the recovery of their cosmology, their astrology and calendars, their exorcisms and charms – the 'interests' of the recorders.

Intended evidence (evidence intentionally provided to posterity) may be studied, within the historical discipline, as objectively as unintended evidence (that is, the greater part of historical evidence which survives for reasons independent of the actors' intentions). In the first case, the intentions are themselves an object of enquiry; and in both cases historical 'facts' are 'produced', by appropriate disciplines, from the evidential facts. But does the confession that, in this disciplined sense, historical facts are 'produced' warrant the half-truth of Hindess and Hirst, that 'facts are never *given*'? If they were *not*, in some sense, given, then historical practice would take place in an empty workshop, manufacturing history (as Althusser and Hindess/Hirst would like to do) out of theoretical air. And the very *given-ness of facts*, the determinate properties which they present to the practitioner, constitutes one half of that dialogue which makes up the discipline of the historian.

Popper seems to see all historical evidence as the Chronicles of Kings. Little historical evidence is 'recorded' in this self-conscious sense: and what there is may still be read in Blake's 'infernal' sense: that is, held upside-down and shaken, until it discloses what its authors assumed but did not intend to record – implicit assumptions and attributes inscribed within the text. Most written sources are of value with little reference to the 'interest' which led to their being recorded. A marriage settlement between a landed scion and the daughter of an East India merchant in the eighteenth century may leave a substantial deposit in a record office, of protracted negotiations, legal deeds, property agreements, even (rarely) an exchange of love

letters. The intention of none of the actors was to record interesting facts to some general posterity: it was to unite and to secure property in particular ways, and perhaps also to negotiate a human relationship. The historian will read these materials, and, in the light of the questions which he proposes, he may derive from them evidence as to property transactions, as to legal procedures, as to the mediations between landed and mercantile groups, as to particular familial structures and kinship ties, as to the institution of bourgeois marriage, or as to sexual attitudes – none of which evidence the actors intended to disclose, and some of which (perhaps) they might have been horrified to know would come to light.

It is the same again and again: *all the time*. People were taxed: the hearth-tax lists are appropriated, not by historians of taxation, but by historical demographers. People were tithed: the terriers are appropriated as evidence by agrarian historians. People were customary tenants or copy-holders: their tenures were enrolled and surrendered in the rolls of the manorial court: these essential sources are interrogated by historians again and again, not only in pursuit of new evidence but in a dialogue in which they propose new questions. So that it seems to a mere historian to be rubbish (as a matter of 'fact', I know that it is rubbish) to assert, with Popper, that 'the sources will, as a rule, contain only facts that fit in with pre-conceived theory.'

That facts are *there*, inscribed in the historical record, with determinate properties, does not, of course, entail some notion that these facts disclose their meanings and relationships (historical knowledge) of themselves, and independently of theoretical procedures. Few empiricists would argue this: and certainly not Popper. But insofar as this notion survives, it survives at a level of methodology rather than theory: that is, if only the correct *method* can be designed, usually quantitative (positivism armed with a computer), then the facts will disclose their meanings independently of any rigorous conceptual exercise. I have argued with the stasis of this kind of 'empiricist' position, for many years, in my own practice,²⁶ and I do not mean to argue it all again. Some small part of what Althusser

has to say about 'empiricism' (when conceived as ideology) is just;²⁷ and it is the instant recognition of the obviousness of this justice – both its 'common sense' and its general academic acceptability – which is the usual gate-of-entry for inexperienced readers, and which beckons them into the interior of his absurd syllogistic world.

Instead of rehearsing this old tale once more, let us put it in this way. A historian is entitled in his practice to make a provisional assumption of an epistemological character: that the evidence which he handles has a 'real' (determinant) existence independent of its existence within the forms of thought, that this evidence is witness to a real historical process, and that this process (or some approximate understanding of it) is the object of historical knowledge. Without making such assumptions he cannot proceed: he must sit in a waiting-room outside the philosophy department all his life. To assume thus does not entail the assumption of a whole series of intellectually illiterate notions, such as that facts involuntarily disclose their own meanings, that answers are supplied independently of questions, etc. We are not talking about pre-history, even if, in some quarters, pre-history survives and even sits robed in chairs. Any serious historian knows that 'facts' are liars, that they carry their own ideological loads, that open-faced, innocent questions may be a mask for exterior attributions, that even the most highly-sophisticated supposedly-neutral and empirical research techniques – techniques which would deliver to us 'history' packaged and untouched by the human mind, through the automatic ingestion of the computer – may conceal the most vulgar ideological intrusions.²⁸ So: this is known: we have been sucking our own eggs for as long as philosophers have been sucking theirs.

The historical evidence is there, in its primary form,²⁹ not to disclose its own meaning, but to be interrogated by minds trained in a discipline of attentive disbelief. The discrete facts may be interrogated in at least six very different ways: 1) Before any other interrogation can be commenced, their credentials as historical facts must be scrutinised: how were they recorded? for

what purpose? can they be confirmed from adjacent evidence? And so on. This is the bread-and-butter of the trade; 2) At the level of their own appearance, or apparent self-disclosure, but within terms of a disciplined historical enquiry. Where the facts under interrogation are social or cultural phenomena, we will most often find that the enquiry adduces *value-bearing evidence*, in which those very qualities of self-evaluation inherent in the phenomena (e.g. attitudes towards or within marriage) become the object of study; 3) As more or less inert, 'neutral', *value-free evidences* (indices of mortality, wage-series, etc.), which are then subjected to enquiry, in the light of the particular questions (demographic, economic, agrarian) proposed: such enquiries having their own appropriate procedures (e.g. statistical) designed to limit (although by no means always successfully) the intrusion of ideological attributions; 4) As *links in a linear series* of occurrences, or contingent events – that is, history 'as it actually happened' (but as it can never be fully known) – in the construction of a narrative account; such a reconstruction (however much it may be despised by philosophers, by sociologists, and by an increasing number of contemporary historians who have been frightened by the first two) being *an essential constituent of the historical discipline*, a pre-requisite and premise of all historical knowledge, the ground of any objective (as distinct from theoretic) notion of causation, and the indispensable preliminary to the construction of an analytic or structured account (which identifies structural and causative relations), even though in the course of such an analysis the primitive sequential narration will itself undergo radical transformation; 5) As *links in a lateral series* of social/ideological/economic/political relations (as, for example – this contract is a special case of the general form of contracts at that time: such contracts were governed by these forms of law: they enforced these forms of obligation and subordination), enabling us thereby to recover or infer, from many instances, at least a provisional 'section' of a given society in the past – its characteristic relations of power, domination, kinship, servitude, market relations, and the rest; 6) It may follow from this, if we press the point a little further,

that even discrete facts may be interrogated for 'structure-bearing' evidence.

This suggestion is more controversial. Many (perhaps most) practising historians would assent to my first five points: these ways of interrogating evidence belong to the discipline, and to its own 'discourse of the proof.' A historical materialist may argue that the structural organisation of given societies may be inferred not only from larger evidences (to which we will, in time, come) but may be inferred, in some part, from certain kinds of seemingly discrete facts themselves. Thus a tenure exists as 'fact' as some Latin formula inscribed upon a court roll: but what that tenure 'meant' cannot be understood independently of an entire structure of tenurial occupancy and attendant law: that is, within a tenurial *system*: hence this 'fact' – and, very certainly, a series of facts of the same order (for certain philosophers of history isolate 'facts' for epistemological scrutiny and lay these on their seminar table for scrutiny one at a time, whereas historians are always handling facts in bunches and in series) – carries within it some 'index' towards that system, or, at least, it should propose to the interrogator an indicative question. Similarly, a bill-of-exchange is an 'index' towards a particular system of credit within which that bill may be negotiated.

The point has significance, not only in relation to Althusser's notion that 'structure' cannot possibly be 'inscribed in' the real (that theory 'produces' this history), but in relation to Popper's nominalism, and 'methodological individualism', which regards all notions of collectivity and of structure as 'holistic' fictions or as abstractions imposed by the observer. But, as MacIntyre has shown, 'the army' is, in Popper's sense, an abstract concept; 'the soldier' is a concrete one, a discrete evidence which he will allow. And yet,

You cannot characterise an army by referring to the soldiers who belong to it. For to do that you have to identify them as soldiers; and to do that is already to bring in the concept of an army. For a soldier just is an individual who belongs to an army. Thus we see that the charac-

terisation of individuals and of classes has to go together. Essentially these are not two separate tasks.³⁰

A nominalist, if he were sufficiently strict, would have to describe the copyhold entry and the bill-of-exchange as passages of writing upon vellum or paper: and he would be at a loss even to describe writing independently of the concept of language. It is the children of yesterday's nominalists who are now the pupils of Althusser.

We will leave it there. I have proposed certain ways of interrogating facts, and no doubt other disciplined and appropriate ways may be proposed. These ways have two common attributes: 1) they assume that the historian is engaged in some kind of encounter with an evidence which is not infinitely malleable or subject to arbitrary manipulation: that there is a real and significant sense in which the facts are 'there', and that they are determining, even though the questions which may be proposed are various, and will elucidate various replies; 2) they involve disciplined and thoughtful application, and a discipline developed precisely to detect any attempt at arbitrary manipulation: the facts will disclose nothing of their own accord, the historian must work hard to enable them to find 'their own voices.' Not the historian's voice, please observe: *their own voices*, even if what they are able to 'say' and some part of their vocabulary is determined by the questions which the historian proposes. They cannot 'speak' until they have been 'asked'.

I have proposed in the foregoing argument certain 'practical objections', from appearances: i.e. what a historian thinks that he is doing, his self-knowledge of his own procedures. It suggests very different procedures from those gestured at by Popper. And Althusser would find in my account reprehensible capitulations to 'empiricist ideology'. But I don't intend to prolong this line of defence: it could be greatly extended, greatly elaborated, and we could enter more closely into the historian's workshop. But to offer a defence would be to agree that a serious case has been made out which requires such defence. And this is not so. Neither Popper nor Althusser show any close

acquaintance with the historian's procedures: neither understands the nature of historical knowledge. Popper shows the greater curiosity, and therefore his objections deserve the courtesy of some reply;³¹ but his repeated confusions between procedures in the experimental sciences and in the historical discipline, and between the different kinds of knowledge which eventuate, defeat his enquiry.³² Althusser shows no curiosity at all. He does not like the product, historical knowledge, and his distaste is perhaps so great that it prevents any kind of nearer acquaintance. He knows that Theory could write better history.

'The knowledge of history is no more historical than the knowledge of sugar is sweet.' Thus Althusser. Let us tease this brave epigram a little. It compels assent in an inattentive mind because of its 'obvious' common sense, indeed its banality: no knowledge can be the same thing as its object. How true! And we could set up an epistemological Mint, to coin epigrams of the same order. 'The knowledge of the French Communist Party is no more Communist than the knowledge of water is wet.' (One could recommend this as a mental distraction during boring railway journeys). Even so, the terms of this banal epigram have been loaded to trick us into a false conclusion. In the first clause ('history...historical') we are deliberately pitched into an ambiguity: for 'historical' may mean appertaining to real historical events or evidence, or it may mean appertaining to the historical discipline (the knowledge of history). Althusser intends us – for a rigorous philosopher could not commit such a solecism in innocence – to confuse these two meanings. For if he had proposed the 'historical knowledge no more appertains to history than sugary knowledge is sweet,' we would not at once recognise a revelation of truth. We would suspect (rightly) that we were being 'got at.' And we would then look more critically at the second clause. Why 'sweet'? In what ways do 'historical' and 'sweet' stand in relation to each other which permits a logical analogy to be drawn? 'Historical' is a generic definition: it defines very generally a common property of its object (appertaining to the past and not to the present or the future). 'Sweet' isolates one property only, from a number

of other properties which might propose themselves. Sugar has chemical properties and constitution, it looks brown or white, it is cubed or in powder, it weighs so much, and the price of it keeps going up. The property singled out by Althusser – sweetness – concerns, not knowledge, but sense-perception. Sugar *tastes* sweet, but no-one has ever tasted history, which would, perhaps, taste bitter. Hence these two clauses stand only in rhetorical or polemical relation to each other.

An honest balancing of the clauses would have given us this: 'The knowledge of history is no more historical than the taste of sugar is sweet.' This would not have astounded innocent readers with Theory's wisdom, nor have sent them running to consult Bachelard and Lacan. Or it could have been proposed in another form again: 'The knowledge of history is no more historical than the knowledge of sugar is chemical.' This would have brought us closer to an analogy; but, then, it would not have served so well the purposes of the Althusserian trick. For we would reflect that the knowledge of history *is* historical (it pertains to the historical discipline) in just the same way as the knowledge of sugar *is* chemical (it finds its definition within chemical science).

What Althusser wishes us to receive from his epigram is this: 'The knowledge of history has got no more to do with real history than the knowledge of sugar has got to do with real sugar.' We would then see that we have been offered no brave discovery, but either an epistemological truism (thought is not the same thing as its object) or else a proposition both of whose clauses are untrue and whose implications are even a little mad. But we are invited to enter the Althusserian theatre through many little verbal turnstiles of this kind: we 'buy' these exalted propositions as our entry fee. All that we need exchange for them is a little of our reason. And once inside the theatre we find that there are no exits.

We might examine other corrupt propositions in the same way, but I will not expose my readers to the tedium. It is time to ask a more serious question: how is it that Althusser, the rational architect, constructed this theatre of the absurd? What problems

was Althusser addressing, whose complexities led him into these agonies of self-mystification? An answer might be proposed at two different levels: ideological and theoretical. We leave aside, for the moment, the ideological enquiry. First, we will do him the justice of considering his ideas at their own self-evaluation: we will suppose that he arrived at irrationalism by procedures (however faulty) of reason.

We have seen that the central fracture which runs through Althusser's thought is a confusion between empirical procedures, empirical controls, and something which he calls 'empiricism.' This fracture invalidates not this or that part of his thought but his thought as a whole. His epistemological stance prevents him from understanding the two 'dialogues' out of which our knowledge is formed: first, the dialogue between social being and social consciousness, which gives rise to experience; second, the dialogue between the theoretical organisation (in all its complexity) of evidence, on the one hand, and the determinate character of its object on the other. As a consequence of the second failure, he cannot understand (or must mis-represent) the character of those empirical procedures which are elaborated, within different disciplines, not only to interrogate 'facts' but to ensure that they reply, not in the interrogator's voice, but in their own voices. As a consequence of the first failure, he cannot understand either the real, existential genesis of ideology, or the ways in which human *praxis* contests this ideological imposition and presses against its bonds. Since he ignores both dialogues, he cannot understand either how historical knowledge 'arrives' (as experience) nor the procedures of investigation and verification of the historical discipline. The 'epistemological break', with Althusser, is a break *from* disciplined self-knowledge and a leap into the self-generation of 'knowledge' according to its own theoretical procedures: that is, a leap out of knowledge and into theology.

He takes this leap because he cannot see any other way out of the compulsive ideological field of genuine empiricism, with its own intellectual complacency and its own self-confirming positivist techniques. 'Positivism, with its narrowed view of

rationality, its acceptance of physics as the paradigm of intellectual activity, its nominalism, its atomism, its lack of hospitality to all general views of the world³³ – this was not invented by Althusser. What he wishes to escape from – the self-enclosed, empiricist prison, whose methodologies patrol with (statistical, linguistic) keys at their belts, locking all doors against the admission of structured process – certainly exists. Althusser has scaled its walls; leapt; and now he constructs his own theatre on an adjacent site. Prison and theatre scowl at each other. But (a curious thing) both prison and theatre are built from much the same materials, even though the rival architects are sworn to enmity. Viewed from the aspect of historical materialism, the two structures exhibit an extraordinary identity. In certain lights the two structures appear to echo each other, merge into each other, exemplify the identity of opposites. For both are the products of conceptual stasis, erected, stone upon stone, from static, a-historical categories.

The critical question concerns less epistemology in its relation to discrete facts (although we have already noted certain similarities here) than the epistemological legitimacy of *historical* knowledge, when considered in its aspect as knowledge of causation, of structure, of the modalities of relationship between social groups or institutions, and of the logic (or 'laws') of historical process. It is here that prison and theatre join common forces against historical materialism, for both assert this knowledge (as a knowledge of the real) to be epistemologically illegitimate. Althusser cannot bruise 'empiricism' at all, because he starts out from the same premise: he merely 'breaks' at a certain point to an idealist conclusion. Both Popper (a) and Althusser (b) affirm the unknowability of history as a process inscribed with its own causation, since (a) any notion of structures and structural mediations entails improper 'holistic' attributions, and 'historicist' notions of causation and of process are unverifiable by experimental tests; or since (b) the notion that knowledge is 'already *really* present in the real object it has to know' is an illusion of 'abstractionist' empiricism, mistaking as empirical discoveries its own ideological attributions. What

does it matter that Althusser should *then* leap to the conclusion that knowledge does and should manufacture out of its own theoretical stuff a historical 'knowledge' which is (in Popper's use of the term) an arrant 'historicism'? A real empiricist will be happy with this, for in his eyes Althusser has only confirmed, by his idealist agility, the unverifiable and ideological character of all such pretensions to historical knowledge. Althusser offers a prime example to the seminar discussion: an epilogue to *The Poverty of Historicism*.

The objections to historical materialism which these antagonists hold in common are: 'facts' (even if knowable) are discrete: they are as 'raw material' impure: therefore (unstated but assumed) multiples of 'facts' multiply impurities. Historical facts survive (as texts) in fortuitous or preselected ways: they arrive already within an ideological field (of a given society in the past, and in terms of its own self-evaluation); they are therefore in no way 'neutral'. Historical notions of causation or of structure are highly-elaborated theoretical constructions; as such, they are the properties of theory and not of its object, 'real' history. No empirical procedures can identify the category, social class; no experiment can be run through to prove the bourgeois character of bourgeois ideology, nor, indeed, to licence such a holistic notion. The vocabulary may be distinct, but the logics of both parties converge. At this point the philosophers shake hands, kiss each other's cheeks, and part. The true empiricist then says: 'The discrete facts are all that can be known. "History" is an improper holistic concept to cover a sequence of discrete facts as in fact they succeeded upon each other. If we introduce concepts, we introduce these as "models" which assist us to investigate and organise these facts; but we must be clear that these models exist in our heads and not "in" the history. And we must develop ever more refined, value-free, and preferably quantitative empirical techniques to enable these facts to disclose themselves as in fact they took place. Whatever happens, I will make sure that no facts escape from their discrete prison cells, enter into relationships, or hold mass meetings.' The exalted Marxist structuralist says: 'Goodbye!

Your procedures bore me. I am going back to my theatre to write the script from some better, revolutionary, history.'

But the curious thing is that, walking off in opposite directions, they end up in much the same place. We will see how this occurs. The 'sciences' (Althusser proposed), 'have no need for verification from *external* practices to declare the knowledge they produce to be "true".' And (we recall) he explicitly nominates historical materialism as one such science. 'Marx's theoretical practice is the criterion of the "truth" of the knowledges that Marx produced.' It is true that he once says in a rare gesture towards an extra-philosophical world, that the successes and failures of this theoretical knowledge 'constitute pertinent "experiments" for the theory's reflection on itself and its internal development.'³⁴ The gesture is indistinct; the "experiments" are not identified; the criteria of success or failure go unspecified; the tone suggests that such "experiments" are pertinent but inessential; and there is no suggestion that they could determine, in any respect, the 'internal development' of theory. So that, once again, we find a remarkable congruence between Althusser's idealist structuralism and Popper's 'weak empiricism.'

Our two philosophers have been walking on distinct, but parallel, paths, nodding to each other across the epistemologically-illiterate flower-beds of the historians. But now the paths converge once again. Popper's radical scepticism has seemed to place us under the guidance of a vigilant logic; Althusser's epistemology directs us to the rigours of theoretical practice; both seem to dignify theory or logic, and to place these above the illusory appearances of 'objective reality.' But the consequence is that both meet, not at the fountain of thought, but staring with bewilderment into the gold-fish pond of appearances. Both paths of logic lead into the same bondage of things.

Popper disallows what cannot be sensed, tested by experiment, verified: but the inter-connections of social phenomena, causation within historical process – these seem to lie beyond any experimental test: hence a weak empiricism leaves us to stare uncomprehendingly at the world's most immediate

manifestations, accepting them as what they are because that is what they seem to be. Althusser, on the contrary, is nothing if not vigilant against 'common sense' appearances. He suspects *every* manifestation, *every* 'exterior' signal: theoretical practice is equipped with its own criteria and its own discourse of the proof. But what follows from this? Since theory has only internal means for its own self-verification, it could develop, by its own extrapolation, in whichever way it pleases. (And so, in some highly-theoreticist expressions, it does.) But we can't in fact get through the business of life in this way, nor can we get through the business of thinking in any substantive manner or about any substantive question. Once we leave epistemology behind, and ask questions about our neighbours, or about the economy, or history, or political practice, then some kind of assumptions (as to what we are thinking *about*) must be made before we can even begin to think.

Since theory disallows any active appropriation of the external world in the only way possible (by active engagement or dialogue with its evidence) then *this whole world must be assumed*. The 'raw materials' (G I) which arrive are simply taken *as given*; and no amount of purely-internal processing by G II into G III can make silk purses out of these sows' ears; they remain (however mocked-up and sophisticated) exactly as they started off – as assumptions (prejudices, cursory 'common sense' surveys of 'what-everyone-knows') which happen to fall conveniently to hand for the confirmation ('illustration') of the prior propositions of the theory. It does not really matter that Popper and Althusser, bent in bewilderment over the same pond, see differently coloured fish: that bourgeois-empirical and Marxist-structural notions of 'what-everyone-knows' are supported upon differing ulterior presuppositions. Both have immaculate epistemological reasons for seeing exactly what they came to see.

There in the pond the appearances swim: to Althusser the fish seem red, to Popper they are grey: one sees gorgeous Workers' State swim by, the other sees, lurking amidst the weeds, a reticent Open Society. They must both end with appearances

since both commenced by denying that appearances are the inscription of an ulterior reality, of relationship and practices, whose significance can be disclosed only after arduous interrogation.

The appearances will not disclose this significance spontaneously and of themselves: does one need to say this yet again? It is not part of my intention to deny the seductive 'self-evident' mystification of appearance, or to deny our own self-imprisonment within unexamined categories. If we suppose that the sun moves around the earth, this will be confirmed to us by 'experience' every day. If we suppose that a ball rolls down a hill through its own innate energy and will, there is nothing in the appearance of the thing that will disabuse us. If we suppose that bad harvests and famine are caused by the visitation of God upon us for our sins, then we cannot escape from this concept by pointing to drought and late frosts and blight, for God could have visited us through these chosen instruments. We have to fracture old categories and to make new ones before we can 'explain' the evidence that has always been there.

But the making and breaking of concepts, the propounding of new hypotheses, the reconstructing of categories, is not a matter of theoretical *invention*. Anyone can do this. Perhaps the famine was some frolic of the devil? The blight in England a consequence of French witch-craft? Or perhaps it was in fulfilment of some ancient curse, consequent upon the Queen's adultery? Appearance will confirm each one of these hypotheses as well: the devil is well known to be abroad, the French well known to be witches, and most queens to be adulterous. And if we suppose the Soviet Union to be a Workers' State guided by an enlightened Marxist theory; or that market forces within capitalist society will always maximise the common good; then in either case we may stand in one spot all day, watching the blazing socialist sun move across blue heavens, or the ball of the Gross National Product roll down the affluent hill, gathering new blessings on its way. We need not recite this alphabet once again.

This alphabet, however, is not some special code, understood

only by logicians. It is a common alphabet, to be mastered at the entry to all disciplines. Nor is it a severe lesson, to be administered periodically to 'empiricists' (and only to them). To be sure, there are such empiricists who require this correction. But the lesson has two edges to its blade. Self-generating hypotheses, subject to no empirical control, will deliver us into the bondage of contingency as swiftly – if not more swiftly – than will surrender to the 'obvious' and manifest. Indeed, each error generates and reproduces the other; and both may often be found, contained within the same mind. What has, it seems, to be recited afresh is the arduous nature of the engagement between thought and its objective materials: the 'dialogue' (whether as *praxis* or in more self-conscious intellectual disciplines) out of which all knowledge is won.

vii

There will now be a brief intermission. You may suppose that the lights have been turned up and the ushers are advancing with trays of ice-cream. During this intermission I intend to discuss historical logic. Philosophers or sociologists who have a dislike or a profound disbelief in this subject are advised to withdraw to the foyer and the bar. They may rejoin us at section viii.

It is not easy to discuss this theme. Not very long ago, when I was in Cambridge as a guest at a seminar of distinguished anthropologists, when I was asked to justify a proposition, I replied that it was validated by 'historical logic.' My courteous hosts dissolved into undisguised laughter. I shared in the amusement, of course; but I was also led to reflect upon the 'anthropological' significance of the exchange. For it is customary within the rituals of the academy for the practitioners of different disciplines to profess respect, not so much for the findings of each other's discipline, as for the authentic credentials of that discipline itself. And if a seminar of historians were to laugh at a philosopher's or anthropologist's very *credentials*, (that is, the logic or discipline central to their practice) this

would be regarded as an occasion for offence. And the significance of this exchange was that it was very generally supposed that 'history' was an exception to this rule; that the discipline central to its practice was an occasion for laughter; and that, so far from taking offence, I, as a practitioner, would join in the laughter myself.

It is not difficult to see how this comes about. The modes of historical writing are so diverse; the techniques employed by historians are so various; the themes of historical enquiry are so disparate; and, above all, the conclusions are so controversial and so sharply contested within the profession, that it is difficult to adduce any disciplinary coherence. And I can well see that there are things within the Cambridge School of History which might occasion anthropological, or other, laughter. Nevertheless, the study of history is a very ancient pursuit, and it would be surprising if, alone among the sciences and humanities, it had failed to develop its own discipline over several thousand years: that is, its own proper discourse of the proof. And I cannot see what this proper discourse is unless it takes the form of historical logic.

This is, I will argue, a *distinct* logic, appropriate to the historian's materials. It cannot usefully be brought within the same criteria as those of physics, for the reasons adduced by Popper and many others: thus, 'history' affords no laboratory for experimental verification, it affords evidence of necessary causes but never (in my view) of sufficient causes, the 'laws' (or, as I prefer it, logic or pressures) of social and economic process are continually being broken into by contingencies in ways which would invalidate any rule in the experimental sciences, and so on. But these reasons are not objections to historical logic, nor do they enforce (as Popper supposes) the imputation of 'historicism' upon any notion of history as the record of a unified process with its own 'rationality.' They simply illustrate (and, on occasion, more helpfully, define) the conclusion that historical logic is not the same as the disciplinary procedures of physics.

Nor can historical logic be subjected to the same criteria as analytic logic, the philosopher's discourse of the proof. The

reasons for this lie, not in historians' lack of logic, as in their need for a different *kind* of logic, appropriate to phenomena which are always in movement, which evince – even in a single moment – contradictory manifestations, whose particular evidences can only find definition within particular contexts, and yet whose general terms of analysis (that is, the questions appropriate to the interrogation of the evidence) are rarely constant and are, more often, in transition alongside the motions of the historical event: as the object of enquiry changes so do the appropriate questions. As Sartre has commented: 'History is not order. It is disorder: a rational disorder. At the very moment when it maintains order, i.e. structure, history is already on the way to undoing it.'³⁵

But disorder of this kind is disruptive of any procedure of analytic logic, which must, as a first condition, handle unambiguous terms and hold them steadily in a single place. We have already noted a propensity in philosophers, when scrutinising 'history's' epistemological credentials, to place 'facts' as isolates upon their table, instead of the historians' customary materials – the evidence of behaviour (including mental, cultural behaviour) eventuating through time. When Althusser and many others accuse historians of having 'no theory', they should reflect that what they take to be innocence or lethargy may be explicit and self-conscious *refusal*: a refusal of static analytic concepts, of a logic inappropriate to history.

By 'historical logic' I mean a logical method of enquiry appropriate to historical materials, designed as far as possible to test hypotheses as to structure, causation, etc., and to eliminate self-confirming procedures ('instances', 'illustrations'). The disciplined historical discourse of the proof consists in a dialogue between concept and evidence, a dialogue conducted by successive hypotheses, on the one hand, and empirical research on the other. The interrogator is historical logic; the interrogative a hypothesis (for example, as to the way in which different phenomena acted upon each other); the respondent is the evidence, with its determinate properties. To name this logic is not, of course, to claim that it is always evidenced in every

historian's practice, or in any historian's practice all of the time. (History is not, I think, unique in failing to maintain its own professions.) But it is to say that this logic does not disclose itself involuntarily; that the discipline requires arduous preparation; and that three thousand years of practice have taught us something. And it is to say that it is this logic which constitutes the discipline's ultimate court of appeal: *not*, please note, 'the evidence', by itself, but the evidence interrogated thus.

To define this logic fully – and to reply to certain of Popper's objections – would require writing a different, and more academic, essay, with many instances and illustrations. In addressing myself more particularly to the positions of Althusser it may be sufficient to offer, in defence of historical materialism, certain propositions.

1) The immediate object of historical knowledge (that is, the materials from which this knowledge is adduced) is comprised of 'facts' or evidences which certainly have a real existence, but which are only knowable in ways which are and ought to be the concern of vigilant historical procedures. This proposition we have already discussed.

2) Historical knowledge is in its nature, a) provisional and incomplete (but not therefore untrue), b) selective (but not therefore untrue), c) limited and defined by the questions proposed to the evidence (and the concepts informing those questions) and hence only 'true' within the field so defined. In these respects historical knowledge may depart from other paradigms of knowledge, when subjected to epistemological enquiry. In this sense I am ready to agree that the attempt to designate history as a 'science' has always been unhelpful and confusing.³⁶ If Marx and, even more, Engels sometimes fell into this error, then we may apologise, but we should not confuse the claim with their actual procedures. Marx certainly knew, also, that History was a Muse, and that the 'humanities' construct knowledges.

3) Historical evidence has determinate properties. While any number of questions may be put to it, only certain questions will be appropriate. While any theory of historical process may be

proposed, all theories are false which are not in conformity with the evidence's determinations. Herein lies the disciplinary court of appeal. In this sense it is true (we may agree here with Popper) that while historical knowledge must always fall short of positive proof (of the kinds appropriate to experimental science), false historical knowledge is generally subject to *disproof*.³⁷

4) It follows from these propositions that the relation between historical knowledge and its object cannot be understood in any terms which suppose one to be a function (inference from, disclosure, abstraction, attribution or 'illustration') of the other. Interrogative and response are mutually determining, and the relation can be understood only *as a dialogue*.

Four further propositions may now be presented at somewhat greater length.

5) The object of historical knowledge is 'real' history whose evidences must necessarily be incomplete and imperfect. To suppose that a 'present', by moving into a 'past', thereby changes its ontological status is to misunderstand both the past and the present.³⁸ The palpable reality of our own (already-passing) present can in no way be changed because it is, *already*, becoming the past for posterity. To be sure, posterity cannot interrogate it in all the same ways; to be sure, you and I, as experiencing instants and actors within our present, will survive only as certain evidences of our acts or thoughts.

While historians may take a decision to select from this evidence, and to write a history of discrete aspects of the whole (a biography, the history of an institution, a history of fox-hunting, etc.), the real object remains unitary. The human past is not an aggregation of discrete histories but a unitary sum of human behaviour, each aspect of which was related in certain ways to others, just as the individual actors were related in certain ways (by the market, by relations of power and subordination, etc.). Insofar as these actions and relations gave rise to changes, which become the object of rational enquiry, we may define this sum as historical *process*: that is, *practices* ordered and structured in rational ways. While this definition arrives in

response to the question asked,³⁹ this does not 'invent' process. We must take our stand here, against Goldmann, and with Bloch (see p. 26). The finished processes of historical change, with their intricate causation, actually occurred, and historiography may falsify or misunderstand, but can't in the least degree modify the past's ontological status. The objective of the historical discipline is the attainment of that history's truth.

Each age, or each practitioner, may propose new questions to the historical evidence, or may bring new levels of evidence to light. In this sense 'history' (when considered as the products of historical enquiry) will change, and ought to change, with the preoccupations of each generation, or, as it may be, each sex, each nation, each social class. But this by no means implies that the past events themselves change with each questioner, or that the evidence is indeterminate. Disagreements between historians may be of many kinds, but they remain as mere exchanges of attitude, or exercises of ideology, unless it is agreed that they are conducted within a common discipline whose pursuit is objective knowledge.

To this proposition it is necessary to add a rider. When we speak of the 'intelligibility' of history, we may mean the understanding of the rationality (of causation, etc.) of historical process: this is an objective knowledge, disclosed in a dialogue with determinate evidence. But we may also imply the 'significance' of that past, its meaning *to us*; this is an evaluative and subjective judgement, and to such interrogatives the evidence can supply no answers. This does not entail the conclusion that any such exercise is improper. We may agree (with Popper) that each generation, each historian, is entitled to express a 'point of view', or (with Kolakowski) that we are entitled to attribute such 'immanent intelligibility' to history as an 'act of faith', provided that we are clear that this rests, not upon scientific procedures, but upon a 'choice of values.'⁴⁰

We may agree not only that such judgements as to the 'meaning' of history are a proper and important activity, a way in which today's actors identify their values and their goals, but that it is also an *inevitable* activity. That is, the preoccupations of

each generation, sex or class must inevitably have a normative content, which will find expression in the questions proposed to the evidence. But this in no way calls in question the objective determinacy of the evidence. It is simply a statement as to the complexity, not just of history, but of ourselves (who are simultaneously valuing and rational beings) – a complexity which enters into all forms of social self-knowledge, and which requires in all disciplines procedural safeguards. It is, exactly, within historical logic that such attributions of meaning, if covert and improper, are exposed; it is in this way that historians find each other out. A feminist historian will say, or ought to say, that this history-book is wrong, not because it was written by a man, but because the historian neglected contiguous evidence or proposed conceptually-inadequate questions: hence a masculine ‘meaning’ or bias was imposed upon the answers. It is the same with the somewhat intemperate arguments which I and my Marxist colleagues often provoke within the academic profession. The appeal is not (or is rarely) to a choice of values, but to the logic of the discipline. And if we deny the determinate properties of the object, then no discipline remains.

But I cannot leave this rider while giving the impression that the attribution of ‘meaning’, as valued-significance, is only a matter for regret, a consequence of human fallibility. I think it to be greatly more important than that. I am not in the least embarrassed by the fact that, when presenting the results of my own historical research, I offer value judgements as to past process, whether openly and strenuously, or in the form of ironies or asides. This is proper, in one part, because the historian is examining individual lives and choices, and not only historical eventuation (process). And while we may not attribute value to process, the same objections do not arise with the same force when we are considering the choices of individuals, whose acts and intentions may certainly be judged (as they were judged by contemporaries) within the due and relevant historical context.

But this is only a special case of a more general question. Only we, who are now living, can give a ‘meaning’ to the past. But

that past has always been, among other things, the result of an argument about values. In recovering that process, in showing how causation actually eventuated, we must, insofar as the discipline can enforce, hold our own values in abeyance. But once this history has been recovered, we are at liberty to offer our judgement upon it.

Such judgement must itself be under historical controls. The judgement must be appropriate to the materials. It is pointless to complain that the bourgeoisie have not been communitarians, or that the Levellers did not introduce an anarcho-syndicalist society. What we may do, rather, is identify with certain values which past actors upheld, and reject others. We may give our vote for Winstanley and for Swift; we may vote against Walpole and Sir Edwin Chadwick.

Our vote will change nothing. And yet, in another sense, it may change everything. For we are saying that these values, and not those other values, are the ones which make this history meaningful *to us*, and that these are the values which we intend to enlarge and sustain in our own present. If we succeed, then we reach back into history and endow it with our own meanings: we shake Swift by the hand. We endorse in our present the values of Winstanley, and ensure that the low and ruthless kind of opportunism which distinguished the politics of Walpole is abhorred.

In the end we also will be dead, and our own lives will lie inert within the finished process, our intentions assimilated within a past event which we never intended. What we may hope is that the men and women of the future will reach back to us, will affirm and renew our meanings, and make our history intelligible within their own present tense. They alone will have the power to select from the many meanings offered by our quarrelling present, and to transmute some part of our process into their progress.

For ‘progress’ is a concept either meaningless or worse, when imputed as an attribute *to* the past (and such attributions may properly be denounced as ‘historicist’), which can only acquire a meaning from a particular position in the present, a position

of value in search of its own genealogy. Such genealogies *exist*, within the evidence: there have been men and women of honour, courage, and 'foresight', and there have been historical movements informed by these qualities. But in spite of Goldmann's authority, we must argue, not that 'historical reality changes from epoch to epoch with modifications in the hierarchy of values,' but that the 'meaning' which we attribute to that reality changes in this way.

This 'rider' to my proposition has taken us a little out of our way. The proposition concerned the objectivity of 'real' history. We seem to return, again and again, to the narrowing circuits of this epistemological whirlpool. Let us try to advance.

6) The investigation of history as process, as eventuation or 'rational disorder', entails notions of causation, of contradiction, of mediation, and of the systematic organisation (sometimes structuring) of social, political, economic and intellectual life. These elaborate notions⁴¹ 'belong' within historical theory, are refined within this theory's procedures, are thought within thought. But it is untrue that they belong *only* within theory. Each notion, or concept, arises out of empirical engagements, and however abstract the procedures of its self-interrogation, it must then be brought back into an engagement with the determinate properties of the evidence, and argue its case before vigilant judges in history's 'court of appeal.' It is, and in a most critical sense, a question of dialogue once more. In the sense that a thesis (the concept, or hypothesis) is brought into relation with its antithesis (atheoretical objective determinacy) and a synthesis (historical knowledge) results we might call this the dialectics of historical knowledge. Or we might have done so, before 'dialectics' was rudely snatched out of our grasp and made into the plaything of scholasticism.

Historical practice is above all engaged in this kind of dialogue; with an argument between received, inadequate, or ideologically-informed concepts or hypotheses⁴² on the one hand, and fresh or inconvenient evidence on the other; with the elaboration of new hypotheses; with the testing of these hypotheses against the evidence, which may involve interro-

gating existing evidence in new ways, or renewed research to confirm or disprove the new notions; with discarding those hypotheses which fail these tests, and refining or revising those which do, in the light of this engagement.

Insofar as a notion finds endorsement from the evidence, then one has every right to say that it *does* exist, 'out there,' *in* the real history. It does not of course actually exist, like some plasma adhering to the facts, or as some invisible kernel within the shell of appearances. What we are saying is that the notion (concept, hypothesis as to causation) has been brought into a disciplined dialogue with the evidence, and it has been shown to 'work'; that is, it has not been *disproved* by contrary evidence, and that it successfully organises or 'explains' hitherto inexplicable evidence; hence it is an adequate (although approximate) representation of the causative sequence, or rationality, of these events, and it conforms (within the logic of the historical discipline) with a process which did in fact eventuate in the past. Hence it exists simultaneously both as a 'true' knowledge and as an adequate representation of an actual property of those events.

7) Historical materialism differs from other interpretive orderings of historical evidence not (or not necessarily) in any epistemological premises, but in its categories, its characteristic hypotheses and attendant procedures,⁴³ and in the avowed conceptual kinship between these and the concepts elaborated by Marxist practitioners in other disciplines. I do not see Marxist historiography as being attendant *on* some general corpus of Marxism-as-theory, located somewhere else (perhaps in philosophy?). On the contrary, if there is a common ground for all Marxist practices then it must be where Marx located it himself, in historical materialism. This is the ground from which all Marxist theory arises, and to which it must return in the end.

In saying this, I am not saying that Marxist historians are not indebted for certain concepts to a general Marxist theory which extends itself towards, and draws upon the findings of, Marxists at work in other fields. This is evidently the case; our work goes

on in a continual exchange. I am disputing the notion that this is a Theory, which has some Home, independently of these practices: a self-validating textual Home, or a Home in the wisdom of some Marxist party, or a Home in purified theoretical practice. The homeland of Marxist theory remains where it has always been, the real human object, in all its manifestations (past and present): which object however, cannot be known in one theoretical *coup d'oeil* (as though Theory could swallow reality in one gulp) but only through discrete disciplines, informed by unitary concepts. These disciplines or practices meet at each other's borders, exchange concepts, converse, correct each other's errors. Philosophy may (and must) monitor, refine, and assist the conversation. But let philosophy attempt to *abstract* the concepts from the practices, and build from them a Home for Theory independently of these, and far removed from any dialogue with theory's object, then we will have – the theatre of Althusser!

It follows that if Marxist concepts (that is, concepts developed by Marx and within the Marxist tradition) differ from other interpretive concepts in historical practice, and if they are found to be more 'true', or adequate to explanation, than others, this will be because they stand up better to the test of historical logic, and not because they are 'derived from' a true Theory outside this discipline. As, in any case, they were not. Insofar as I am myself deeply indebted for certain concepts to Marx's own practice, I refuse to evade responsibility by falling back upon his authority or to escape from criticism by leaping from the court of appeal. For historical knowledge, this court lies within the discipline of history and nowhere else.

Appeal may take two forms: a) evidential, which has been sufficiently discussed, and b) theoretical – to the coherence, adequacy and consistency of the concepts, and to their congruence with the knowledge of adjacent disciplines. But both forms of appeal may be conducted only within the vocabulary of historical logic. The court has been sitting in judgement upon historical materialism for one hundred years, and it is continually being adjourned. The adjournment is in effect a

tribute to the robustness of the tradition; in that long interval the cases against a hundred other interpretive systems have been upheld, and the culprits have disappeared 'downstairs'. That the court has not yet found decisively in favour of historical materialism is not only because of the ideological *parti pris* of certain of the judges (although there is plenty of that) but also because of the provisional nature of the explanatory concepts, the *actual* silences (or absent mediations) within them, the primitive and unreconstructed character of some of the categories, and the inconclusive determinacy of the evidence.

8) My final proposition brings a fundamental reservation to bear upon Althusserian epistemology, and also upon certain structuralisms or functional systems (e.g. Parsonian sociology) which periodically attempt to over-run the historical discipline. Certain critical categories and concepts employed by historical materialism can only be understood as *historical categories*: that is, as categories or concepts appropriate to the investigation of process, the scrutiny of 'facts' which, even in the moment of interrogation, change their form (or retain their form but change their 'meanings'), or dissolve into other facts; concepts appropriate to the handling of evidence not capable of static conceptual representation but only as manifestation or as contradiction.

The construction of historical concepts is not of course a special privilege peculiar to historical materialism. Such concepts arise within the historians' common discourse, or are developed within adjacent disciplines. The classic concept of the crisis of subsistence⁴⁴ proposes a rational sequence of events: as, for example, poor harvest → dearth → rising mortality → the consumption of next year's seed → a second poor harvest → extreme dearth → a peak in mortality, accompanied by epidemic → a sharply rising conception-rate. The concept of the familial development cycle proposes a particular three-generational sequence within the same peasant household, modified by the particular conditions of land tenure and inheritance practice. These concepts, which are generalised by logic from many examples, are brought to bear upon the evidence,

not so much as 'models' but rather as 'expectations.' They do not impose a rule, but they hasten and facilitate the interrogation of the evidence, even though it is often found that each case departs, in this or that particular, from the rule. The evidence (and the real event) is not rule-governed, and yet it could not be understood without the rule, to which it offers its own irregularities. This provokes impatience in some philosophers (and even sociologists) who consider that a concept with such elasticity is not a true concept, and a rule is not a rule unless the evidence conforms to it, and stands to attention in one place.

Historical concepts and rules are often of this order. They display extreme elasticity and allow for great irregularity; the historian appears to be evading rigour as he disappears into the largest generalisations at one moment, while at the next moment he disappears into the particularities of the qualifications in any special case. This provokes distrust, and even laughter, within other disciplines. Historical materialism employs concepts of equal generality and elasticity – 'exploitation', 'hegemony', 'class struggle' – and as expectations rather than as rules. And even categories which appear to offer less elasticity – 'feudalism', 'capitalism', 'the bourgeoisie' – appear in historical practice, not as ideal types fulfilled in historical evolution, but as whole families of special cases, families which include adopted orphans and the children of typological miscegenation. History knows no regular verbs.

It is the misfortune of Marxist historians (it is certainly our special misfortune today) that certain of our concepts are common currency in a wider intellectual universe, are adopted in other disciplines, which impose their own logic upon them and reduce them to static, a-historical categories. No historical category has been more misunderstood, tormented, transfixed, and de-historicised than the category of social class;⁴⁵ a self-defining historical formation, which men and women make out of their own experience of struggle, of which men are not the makers but the vectors. Not only have Althusser and Poulantzas done Marxist history this wrong, but they then complain that

history (from whose arms they abducted this concept) has no proper theory of class! What they, and many others, of every ideological hue, misunderstand is that it is not, and never has been, the business of history to make up this kind of inelastic theory. And if Marx himself had one supreme methodological priority it was, precisely, to destroy unhistorical theory-mongering of this kind.

History is not a factory for the manufacture of Grand Theory, like some Concorde of the global air; nor is it an assembly-line for the production of midget theories in series. Nor yet is it some gigantic experimental station in which theory of foreign manufacture can be 'applied', 'tested', and 'confirmed.' That is not its business at all. Its business is to recover, to 'explain', and to 'understand' its object: real history. The theories which historians adduce are directed to this objective, within the terms of historical logic, and there is no surgery which can transplant foreign theories, like unchanged organs, into other, static, conceptual logics, or *vice versa*. Our objective is historical knowledge; our hypotheses are advanced to explain this particular social formation in the past, that particular sequence of causation.

Our knowledge (we hope) is not thereby imprisoned within that past. It helps us to know who we are, why we are here, what human possibilities have been disclosed, and as much as we can know of the logic and forms of social process. Some part of that knowledge may be theorised, less as rule than as expectation. And exchanges may and should take place with other knowledges and theories. But the exchange involves vigilance, as the theoretical coin of one discipline is translated into the currency of another. Philosophy ought not to stand on every frontier like a huckster, offering spurious 'universal' bank-notes current in all lands. It might, instead, operate a watchful *bureau de change*.

Those propositions of historical materialism which bear upon the relation between social being and social consciousness, upon the relations of production and their determinations, upon modes of exploitation, class struggle, ideology, or upon capitalist social and economic formations, are (at one pole of

their 'dialogue') derived from the observation of historical eventuation *over time*. This observation is not of discrete facts *seriatim* but of *sets* of facts with their own regularities: of the repetition of certain kinds of event: of the congruence of certain kinds of behaviour within differing contexts: in short, of the evidences of systematic social formations and of a common logic of process. Such historical theories as arise (not of themselves, but, at the other pole of the dialogue, by arduous conceptualisation) can not be tested, as is often supposed, by calling a halt to process, 'freezing' history, and taking a static geological section, which will show capitalism or class hierarchies at any given moment of time as an elaborated structure.⁴⁶ In investigating history we are not flicking through a series of 'stills', each of which shows us a moment of social time trans-fixed into a single eternal pose: for each one of these 'stills' is not only a moment of being but also a moment of becoming: and even within each seemingly-static section there will be found contradictions and liaisons, dominant and subordinate elements, declining or ascending energies. Any historical moment is both a result of prior process and an index towards the direction of its future flow.

There are well-known difficulties, both in explaining historical process and in verifying any explanation. 'History' itself is the only possible laboratory for experiment, and our only experimental equipment is historical logic. If we press improper analogies with experimental sciences, we will soon find out that the whole business is unsatisfactory. History never affords the conditions for identical experiments; and while, by comparative procedures, we may observe somewhat similar experiments in different national laboratories (the rise of the nation state, industrialization) we can never reach back into those laboratories, impose our own conditions, and run the experiment through once again.

But such analogies have never been helpful. The fact that the difficulties of historical explanation are immense should surprise no-one. We inhabit the same element ourselves (a present becoming a past), a human element of habit, need,

reason, will, illusion and desire, and we should know it to be made up of obstinate stuff. And yet there is one sense in which the past improves upon the present, for 'history' remains its own laboratory of process and eventuation. A static section may show us certain elements (A, B & C) in mutual inter-relationship or contradiction; eventuation over time will show us how these relationships were lived through, fought out, resolved, and how ABC gave rise to D; and this eventuation will, in turn, throw light back upon the ways in which the elements were previously related and the strength of the contradiction.

In this sense the eventuation confirms or disproves, hardens or qualifies, the explanatory hypothesis. This is a bad laboratory in one sense: that the event took place in this way may be the consequence of some contingent element (X) overlooked in the explanation; thus ABC + X may have eventuated in one way (D), but ABC + Y would have eventuated differently (E); and to overlook this is to fall into the familiar error of arguing *post hoc ergo propter hoc*. This is a besetting problem of all historical explanation, and philosophers who have glanced at our procedures have made a hearty meal of it. But they overlook the fact that in another sense 'history' is a good laboratory, because process, eventuation, is present within every moment of the evidence, testing every hypothesis in an outcome, providing results for every human experiment that has ever been conducted. Our logic is fallible. But the very multiplicity of experiments, and their congruence to each other, limit the dangers of error. The evidence as to any particular episode may be imperfect: there will be plenty of gaps when we consider eventuation in the form of discrete facts in series: but (at least in less distant history)⁴⁷ sufficient evidence survives to disclose the logic of this process, its outcome, the characteristic social formations, and how ABC in fact gave rise to D.

We may make this point more clear if we consider a problem, not from the past, but from the historical present. The Soviet Union is such a problem. In order to explain one aspect of this problem – who holds power and in what direction is political process tending? – a number of explanatory hypotheses are

proposed. For example, the Soviet Union is a Workers' State (perhaps with certain 'deformities') capable of ascendant self-development, without any severe internal struggle or rupture of continuity: all 'short-comings' are capable of self-correction, owing to the guidance of a proletarian party, informed by Marxist Theory, and hence blessed with the 'know-how' of history. Or the Soviet Union is a state in which power has fallen into the hands of a new bureaucratic class, whose interest it is to secure its own privileges and continued tenure of power – a class which will only be overthrown by another proletarian revolution. Or the Soviet State is the instrument of a historically-specific form of forced industrialization, which has thrown up an arbitrary and contingent collocation of ruling-groups, which may now be expected to be the agents of the 'modernization' of Soviet society, bringing it into tardy and imperfect conformity with that true model of modern man: the United States. Or (which is closer to my own view) the Soviet State can only be understood with the aid of the concept of 'parasitism', and whether or not its ruling groups harden into a bureaucratic class, or whether episodic reform can be imposed upon them by pressures of various kinds (from the needs and resistances of workers and farmers, from intellectual dissenters, and from the logic arising from their own inner contradictions, factional struggles, and incapacity to perform essential functions, etc.) remains, historically, an unfinished and indeterminate question, which may be precipitated into one or another more fully-determined direction by contingencies.

There is a real and important sense in which these (or other) hypotheses will only find confirmation or refutation in the *praxis* of eventuation. The experiment is still being run through, and (much as Althusser dislikes Engels's Mancunian colloquialism) 'the proof of the pudding will be in the eating.' The result, when brought within the scrutiny of future historians, may appear to confirm one hypothesis, or may propose a new hypothesis altogether. Any such 'confirmation', if it should arise, can never be more than approximate: history is not rule-governed, and it knows no sufficient causes: and if future historians suppose

otherwise they would be falling into the error of *post hoc ergo propter hoc*. The hypotheses, or the blend of ideology and of self-knowledge, which we, or the Soviet people, adopt in this present will themselves enter as an element within eventuating process. And if some different 'contingency' had impinged upon these elements (for example, if a Third World War had arisen from the Cuba crisis), then all would have eventuated differently, the military and security forces would have been immensely strengthened, and a different hypothesis might then appear to have explanatory force.

But this is not as devastating a qualification as may at first appear. For it will be *as* matters eventuate, *as* the 'experiment' works out, which will afford to future historians immense additional insight as to the critical relations structuring Soviet society, which underlie the appearances of our historical present. The 'result' will afford to them additional insight into which formidable elements (perhaps the State ideology of Marxism-Leninism) were to prove, in the event, to be fragile and in decline, and which inarticulate, loosely-structured elements pre-figured an emergent opposition. The historians of the future, who will know *how* things turned out will have a powerful aid to understanding, not why they *had* to turn out in that way, but why in fact they did: that is they will observe in the laboratory of events the evidence of determination, not in its sense as rule-governed law but in its sense of the 'setting of limits' and the 'exerting of pressures.'⁴⁸ And today's historians stand in exactly the same position in relation to the historical past, which is, simultaneously, the object of investigation and its own experimental laboratory.

That historical explanation cannot deal in absolutes and cannot adduce sufficient causes greatly irritates some simple and impatient souls. They suppose that, since historical explanation cannot be All, it is therefore Nothing; it is no more than a consecutive phenomenological narration. This is a silly mistake. For historical explanation discloses not how history *must* have eventuated but why it eventuated in this way and not in other ways; that process is not arbitrary but has its own

regularity and rationality; that certain kinds of event (political, economic, cultural) have been related, not in any way one likes, but in particular ways and within determinate fields of possibility; that certain social formations are – not governed by ‘law’ nor are they the ‘effects’ of a static structural theorem – but are characterised by determinate relations and by a particular logic of process. And so on. And a great deal more. Our knowledge may not satisfy some philosophers, but it is enough to keep us occupied.

We have left our eighth proposition behind, and we may now rehearse it once again. The categories appropriate to the investigation of history are historical categories. Historical materialism is distinguished from other interpretive systems by its stubborn consistency (alas, a stubbornness which has sometimes been doctrinaire) in elaborating such categories, and by its articulation of these within a conceptual totality. This totality is not a finished theoretical ‘truth’ (or Theory); but neither is it a make-belief ‘model’; it is a developing *knowledge*, albeit a provisional and approximate knowledge with many silences and impurities. The development of this knowledge takes place both within theory and within practice: it arises from a dialogue: and its discourse of the proof is conducted within the terms of historical logic. The actual operations of this logic do not appear, step by step, on every page of a historian’s work; if they did, history books would exhaust all patience. But this logic should be implicit in each empirical engagement, and explicit in the way in which the historian positions himself before the evidence and in the questions proposed. I do not claim that historical logic is always as rigorous or as self-conscious as it ought to be; nor that our practice often matches our professions. I claim only that there is such logic. And that not all of us are wet behind the ears.

The intermission is now over. Philosophers and sociologists are requested to cease chatting in the aisles, and to resume their

places in the empty seats around me. The auditorium is darkening. A hush falls in the theatre. And Althusser resumes the stage.

The great impresario has returned refreshed, and in an uncanny mood of geniality. He announces that the heavy epistemological drama will be suspended: we have done with history and tragedy for the time. Instead, he will present a burlesque sketch of his own composition, a little influenced by Sade. A superannuated clown with pretensions to epistemological respectability, will be brought in (the audience must please keep straight faces at first), quizzed, exposed, mocked, tormented, and finally booted and hooted off the stage. From the wings he drags on, gouty, dim-eyed, a fool’s cap upon his head, that poor old duffer, Frederick Engels.

The sketch starts a little slowly, and with subtlety. Engels is interrogated about ‘parallelograms of forces’, about ‘individual wills’ and historical ‘resultants’; he is convicted of tautology; he hangs his head; he is forgiven (‘I am quite prepared to ignore Engels’s reference to *nature*’). He is convicted of worse confusion, of association with bourgeois ideology; he hangs his head again; is sharply reprimanded (a ‘futile construction’), but then is given a toffee (he has ‘genial theoretical intuitions’). He smiles and nods to the audience, little expecting what is to follow. The dialogue is a little difficult to follow, especially as the clown is not allowed to respond. We will take the script home and comment on it later.⁴⁹

Now the whip is brought on:

When, in *Anti-Dühring*, Engels writes that ‘Political Economy is . . . essentially a historical science’, because ‘it deals with material which is historical, that is, constantly changing’, he touches the exact spot of the ambiguity: the word ‘*historical*’ may either fall towards the Marxist concept or towards the ideological concept of history, according to whether this word designates the *object of knowledge* of a theory of history, or, on the contrary, the real object of which this theory gives the knowledge. We have every right to say that the theory of Marxist political economy derives from the Marxist theory of history, as one of its regions; but we might also think [i.e. Engels’s words might allow us

to suppose] that the theory of political economy is affected even in its concepts by the peculiar *quality* of real history (its 'material' which is 'changing').

The clown 'rushes us into this latter interpretation in a number of astonishing texts which introduce history (in the empiricist-ideological sense) even into Marx's categories.' Absurdity of absurdities! He even says that it is wrong to expect 'fixed, cut-to-measure once and for all applicable definitions in Marx's works.' And he argues:

It is self-evident that where things and their inter-relations are conceived, not as fixed, but as changing, their mental reflections, *the concepts are likewise subject to change and transformation.*

Worse still, he is caught with his buttocks exposed, in an obscene anti-theoreticist posture:

To *science definitions are worthless* because always inadequate. The only *real* definition is the *development* of the *thing* itself, but *this is no longer a definition.*⁵⁰ To know and show all forms of life we must examine all forms of life and present them in their inter-connexion. (R.C. 113. Althusser's exclamatory italics).

Thus the old buffer is exposed in an 'astonishing' relapse into empiricist 'ideology.' He is convicted of supposing that 'the necessary concepts of any theory of history are affected in their conceptual substance, by the *properties* of the *real* object':

In this way, Engels applies to the concepts of the theory of history a *coefficient of mobility* borrowed directly from the concrete empiricalsequence (from the ideology of history), transposing the 'real-concrete' into the 'thought-concrete' and the historical as real change into the concept itself. (R.C. 114)

But this time the old clown's abject apologies earn him no remission of punishment. The boot and the whip fall inexorably. For it turns out that he is not a clown at all; he is a cunning fellow, masquerading in clown's motley, hoping to pass off as

jests the malice of his true nature. This nature is fully revealed at the very end of the act; for in March 1895, five months before his death, the old man sheds all disguises and is found writing to Conrad Schmidt:

The objections you raise to the law of value apply to *all* concepts, regarded from the standpoint of reality. The identity of thinking and being, to express myself in Hegelian fashion, everywhere coincides with your example of the circle and the polygon. Or the two of them, the concept of a thing and its reality, run side by side like two asymptotes, always approaching each other yet never meeting. *This difference between the two is the very difference which prevents the concept from being directly and immediately reality and reality from being immediately its own concept.* Because a concept has the essential nature of that concept and cannot therefore *prima facie* directly coincide with reality, from which it must first be abstracted, it is something more than a fiction, unless you are going to declare all the results of thought fictions because reality corresponds to them only very circuitously, and even when only with asymptotic approximation.

Now at last the sketch is brought to a close, the old man is booted whimpering into the wings, the curtain is rung down. Engels's letter 'is astounding (despite the banality of its obviousness)'. Engels's blunders would mark 'Marxist philosophical theory . . . and with what a mark! The mark of the empiricist theory of Knowledge . . .' On every side of me the audience bursts into rapturous applause.

What a clever sketch! It is a pity it was so brief, perhaps, because – now it has been shown to us – one can think of other earlier lines of this same clown which could have been turned to equal account. There was, for example, that malicious (decidedly not innocent) assault on philosophy itself, in *Ludwig Feuerbach*, which Althusser has no doubt not forgiven, and for which he is now taking his revenge. 'The proof' of the Marxist conception of history (Engels unashamedly avowed) 'is to be found in history itself':

This conception, however, puts an end to philosophy in the realm of history, just as the dialectical conception of nature made all natural

philosophy both unnecessary and impossible. It is no longer a question anywhere of inventing interconnections from out of our brains, but of discovering them in the facts. For philosophy, which has been expelled from nature and history, there remains only the realm of pure thought (so far as it is left): the theory of the laws of the thought-process itself, logic and dialectics. (*L.F.* 69)

What self-restraint in Althusser not to flagellate these notions ('discovering them in the facts'!!!): but the comedy would have been over-facile. Or there is that other 'astonishing' text in *Anti-Dühring*:

If we deduce world schematism not from our minds, but only *through* our minds from the real world, deducing the basic principles of being from what is, we need no philosophy for this purpose, but positive knowledge of the world and of what happens in it; and what this yields is also not philosophy, but positive science. (*A-D*, 45)

(How does it happen that no record of Marx's explosion before this apostasy has been recorded?) Or we could have browsed more generally through the old clown's later letters. Even that letter to Schmidt, which Althusser has singled out for corrective treatment, does not end there; it *goes on*, and, if anything, gets *worse*! All of Marx's economic concepts – the general rate of profit, the law of wages, rent – indeed, 'economic laws in general – none of them has any reality except as approximation, tendency, average, and not as *immediate* reality.' It is the same for historical concepts also:

Did feudalism ever correspond to its concept? Founded in the kingdom of the West Franks, further developed in Normandy by the Norwegian conquerors, its formation continued by the French Norsemen in England and Southern Italy, it came nearest to its concepts – in Jerusalem, in the kingdom of a day, which in the *Assises de Jerusalem* left behind it the most classic expression of the feudal order. Was this order therefore a fiction because it only achieved a short-lived existence in full classical form in Palestine, and even that mostly only – on paper?

And the same epistemological irresponsibility is displayed even with reference to the present, and *to the future*! For Engels tells

Schmidt that the laws of value and of profit,

Both only attain their most complete approximate realisation on the pre-supposition that capitalist production has been everywhere established, society reduced to the modern classes of landowners, capitalists (industrialists and merchants) and workers – all intermediate stages, however, having been got rid of. This does not exist even in England and never will exist – we shall not let it get so far as that.

What a solecism! To introduce into the discourse of the proof a category, 'we' (the agency of an old man and his imaginary friends), derived from a different 'region' (and a suspect region, too – does it smack of 'humanism'?) and for which the Theory has made no provision!

But (for we are stern critics) the dramatist might surely have enriched his sketch in other ways? Why only *one* clown? Why not *two* clowns, a thin one stooping with age, and a fatter one, more robust and youthful, as foils to each other? Let us drag from the wings, perspiring, tormented by carbuncles, the super-clown, fatty Marx! He makes his bow, and recites from an early letter (to P.V. Annenkov, December 1846) (and *after* the 'epistemological break'), a criticism of Proudhon:

He has not perceived that *economic categories* are only the *abstract expressions* of these actual relations and only remain true while these relations exist. He therefore falls into the error of the bourgeois economists who regard these economic categories as eternal and not as historic laws which are only laws for a particular historical development . . . Instead, therefore, of regarding the political-economic categories as abstract expressions of the real, transitory, historic social relations, Monsieur Proudhon only sees, thanks to a mystic transposition, the real relations as embodiments of these abstractions. These abstractions therefore are formulae which have been slumbering in the heart of God the Father since the beginning of the world.

Categories, then, 'are historic and transitory products,' whereas, according to Proudhon, 'they, and not men, make history':

The *abstraction*, the *category taken as such*, i.e. apart from men and their material activities, is of course immortal, unmoved, unchangeable, it is

only one form of the being of pure reason; which is only another way of saying that the abstraction as such is abstract. An admirable *tautology*!

And, writing to Schweitzer nearly twenty years later (January 1865), Marx returned to the critique of Proudhon, in exactly the same terms: 'he shares the illusions of speculative philosophy in his treatment of the *economic categories*; for instead of conceiving them as *the theoretical expression of historic relations of production, corresponding to a particular stage of development in material production*, he garbles them into pre-existing *eternal ideas* . . .'

But let us cease to imagine improvements in the sketch. Let us sit down and examine it as it has been presented.

ix

What is all this about? It would be simple to dismiss the whole argument on the grounds that Althusser has proposed a spurious question, necessitated by his prior epistemological confusions. This is, in fact, a large part of the answer, and a sufficient answer to Althusser, and it can be briefly stated. He has proposed a pseudo-opposition. On the one hand, he presents Theory (and *Capital* itself) as 'occurring exclusively in knowledge and concerning exclusively the necessary order of appearance and disappearance of concepts in the discourse of the scientific proof.' (R.C. 114) On the other side, across from his rather grand project, he presents the petty projects of 'empiricism', which constitute 'ideology.' Engels is trying to muddle the two, which would be disastrous (the mark of the empiricist Beast!), since the discourse of the proof must, as a prerequisite, demand the fixity and unambiguity of concepts. But we have already seen that Althusser's notion of 'empiricism' is false, and that it imposes the canons of philosophy upon quite different procedures and disciplines. We need follow this argument no further.

Even within its own terms, Althusser's argument offers self-

contradictions and evasions. Thus he tells us that 'we have every right to say that the theory of Marxist political economy derives from the Marxist theory of history, as one of its regions'; but he also tells us (see p. 19) that the theory of history, even now, 100 years after *Capital*, 'does not exist in any real sense.' So that in one of its 'regions' Marxist political theory was derived from 'an absent theory.' This goes along with the evasion of the evident fact that in *other* of its regions, this political economy was derived, very directly, from empirical engagement, either directly (from the mountain of blue books, etc., etc., to which Marx pays such generous tribute,⁵¹) or less directly, by intense and critical scrutiny of the empirically-based studies of other writers.

So that Althusser set out with a bad argument, and he rigged the terms to make it look better. Engels would appear to have been arguing two propositions. First, the inherently 'approximate' nature of all our concepts, and especially of those necessarily 'fixed' concepts which arise from and are brought to the analysis of changing, *unfixed* social development. This may be a 'banality' in its 'obviousness' to a philosopher, who supposes that it 'is only another way of saying that the abstraction as such is abstract', an 'admirable *tautology*' which rarely leaves Althusser's lips. But, to a historian or an economist, it is (while 'obvious' as theory) exceptionally complex in fact: it is an obviousness which can only too easily be forgotten in practice, and of which we need reminders.

Moreover, Engels is not just saying that concepts and their 'real object' are different. It is true that he overstates his case in a moment of exasperation at the old bourgeois scholastics and the new 'Marxist' schematists on every side: 'to science definitions are worthless.' We understand his exasperation only too well. But the point of his letter to Schmidt is to argue, a) that because all concepts are approximations, this does not make them 'fictions', b) that only the concepts can enable us to 'make sense of', understand and know, objective reality, c) but that even in the act of knowing we can (and ought to) know that our concepts are more abstract and more logical than the diversity

of that reality – and, by empirical observation, *we can know this too*. We cannot understand European medieval society without the concept of feudalism, even though, with the aid of this concept, we can also know that feudalism (in its conceptual logic) was never expressed ‘in full classical form’; which is another way of saying that feudalism is a heuristic concept which represents (corresponds to) real social formations, but, in the manner of all such concepts, does so in an overly purified and logical way. The definition cannot give us the real event. In any case, Engels’s words are clearer than my gloss. What they come back to, as so often in these last letters, is the cry for ‘dialectics’, whose true meaning is to be found less in his attempt to reduce these to a formal code than in his practice. And an important part of this practice is exactly that ‘dialogue’ between concept and evidence which I have already discussed.

Engels’s second point concerns the nature of specifically *historical* concepts, concepts adequate to the understanding of materials which are in continuous change. Althusser exclaims against the notion that ‘the theory of Political Economy is affected even in its concepts by the peculiar *quality* of real history (its ‘material’ which is ‘changing’).’ The short answer to this is that if the real object of this knowledge is changing, and if the concepts cannot encompass the processes of change, then we will get extremely bad Political Economy. Not only Marxist but orthodox bourgeois Political Economy had an arsenal of such concepts of change (laws of this and that, rising and falling rates of the other, even the mobilities of supply and demand). What Althusser means to exclaim against is an irreverence to the fixity of categories. Engels says not only that the object changes but that the concepts *themselves* must be ‘subject to change and transformation.’ For Althusser capitalism must be one thing: or another thing: or nothing. It cannot be one thing now, and another thing tomorrow. And if it is one thing, then the essential categories must remain the same, however much ‘play’ there may be inside them. If the categories change as the object changes, according to a ‘coefficient of mobility’, then science or Theory are lost; we drift among the tides of phenomena, the

tides themselves moving the rudder; we become (as Marx accused the students of Ranke) the ‘valets’ of history.

But it is not clear that Engels has set us adrift like this. The offensive words (in my view) are not ‘concepts . . . are subject to change and transformation’ (for that may well indicate, and *does* indicate for Engels, the strenuous theoretical-empirical dialogue entailed in transformation), but the preceding words, ‘their mental reflections.’⁵² And Engels may equally be signalling – and, I think is, signalling in his discussion of the concept, feudalism – the particular flexibility of concepts appropriate in historical analysis: that is, the necessary generality and elasticity of historical categories, as expectations rather than as rules. I have had occasion enough to observe in my own practice that if a category as generous as ‘the working class’ is improperly hardened by theoreticians to correspond to a particular historical moment of class presence (and an ideal moment at that), then it very soon gives false and disastrous historical/political results; and yet without the (elastic) category of class – an expectation justified by evidence – I could not have practised at all.

So that I think that Engels is talking good sense, that Althusser has misrepresented him, and is talking no sense at all. But, nevertheless, it is true that a real problem remains. We cannot just say that Engels is right and Althusser wrong. Althusser has mis-stated the problem, but at least we may admit that he has pointed to the area where the problem lies. The problem concerns, from one aspect, the differing modes of analysis of *structure* and of *process*. And, from another aspect, the status of ‘Political Economy’ and, hence, the status of *Capital*. We will take it from the second aspect first.

We must commence, at once, by agreeing that *Capital* is not a work of ‘history’. There is a history of the development of the forms of capital inscribed within it, but this is rarely developed within the historical discipline, or tested by the procedures of historical logic. The historical passages are something more than ‘instances’ and ‘illustrations’, but something less than the real history. We will explain this more fully in a moment. But we

must say at once that Marx never pretended, when writing *Capital*, that he was writing the history of capitalism. This is well known, but we will offer reminders. Marx hopes (as is apparent from the *Grundrisse* notebooks) that his work would 'also offer the key to the understanding of the past – a work in its own right which, it is to be hoped, we shall be able to undertake as well.'⁵³ This hope was not fulfilled. The work which was completed was that described (to Lassalle in 1858) as 'a critique of the economic categories or the system of bourgeois economy, critically presented'; and it dealt (he told Kugelmann) with 'capital in general.' The first volume 'contains what the English call "the principles of Political Economy".' And its title was: *Capital, a Critique of Political Economy*.⁵⁴

One way of proceeding may be to stand back from the structure for a moment, and enquire what kind of structure it is. First, we must note that some part of the power of the work comes not from its explicit procedures, and from its discourse of its object, but from choices as to values (and their vigorous and relevant expression) which could not possibly be deduced from the conceptual procedures themselves, and which are not the object of study. That is, Marx does not only lay bare the economic processes of exploitation, but he also expresses (or presents his material so as to evoke) indignation at suffering, poverty, child labour, waste of human potentialities, and contempt for intellectual mystifications and apologetics.

I comment on this, neither to commend it nor to condemn it, although the relevance may appear later. Since Marx's choice of values could be justified only with reference to a 'region' which Althusser curtly dismisses as 'ideology', we might have to explain (even condone) it as a vestige of bourgeois moralism, even humanism. Certainly, no such vestiges appear with Althusser and Balibar: when they have 'read' *Capital* it has been disinfested of all this. We may, or we may not, prefer the first to the second 'reading' of *Capital*; the point is that, in this significant respect, they are different books.

Second, it may follow from this, and I think it *does* so follow, that if we disinfest *Capital* in this way of all 'moralistic' intru-

sions, a very considerable part of that work – the major part – could be taken *just as* 'what the English call "the principles of Political Economy": an analytic critique of the existing 'science', and an exposition of an alternative 'science', of economic functions, relations, and laws. That is, if we did not (for exterior 'reasons' of value) disapprove of exploitation, waste and suffering, then we would find ourselves presented with an alternative lawed structure of economic relations. To be true, the reader whose interests lay with 'capital' would find its conclusions pessimistic; for the system is presented as moving rapidly towards a final crisis (which has not yet eventuated). But this could not afford any 'scientific' reasons for disagreement.

These two considerations are not introduced for 'moralistic' purposes. They help us to take a sighting of *Capital* within the intellectual context of its moment of genesis. And they remind us that the notions of *structure* and of *system* were not inventions of Marx (although one might suppose so from some contemporary statements). We had, as is well known, in eighteenth-century Britain very marvellous structures, the admiration of the world and the envy of the French. In particular, the constitutional structures were exemplary, and had perhaps been provided to the British by God:

Britain's matchless Constitution, mixt
Of mutual checking and supporting Powers,
Kings, Lords and Commons . . .

Or, in the familiar clockwork analogy, as employed by William Blackstone: 'Thus every branch of our civil polity supports and is supported, regulates and is regulated, by the rest . . . Like three distinct powers in mechanics, they jointly impel the machine of government in a direction different from what either, acting by itself, would have done . . .'

God, as Bacon had pointed out, worked by second causes, and these causes, whether in nature, in psychology or in the constitution, often appeared as *sets* of interacting causes (structures). The sets that mechanical materialism proposed followed

the paradigm of the clock, or of the mill. The constitutional set was governed by the rule of law. But bourgeois Political Economy (from Adam Smith forward) discovered a different set, seen now more as a 'natural process', whose nexus was the market, where intersecting self-interests were mediated, under the government of that market's laws. By the time that Marx confronted it, this Political Economy had become, by way of Malthus, Ricardo, and the Utilitarians, a very sophisticated structure indeed, rigorous in its procedures and inclusive in its claims.

Marx identified this structure as his major antagonist, and he bent the whole energies of his mind to confounding it.⁵⁵ For nearly twenty years this was his major preoccupation. He had to enter into each one of the categories of Political Economy, fracture them, and re-structure them. We can see the evidences of these encounters in the *Grundrisse* notebooks of 1857-8, and it is customary to admire their exhaustive ardour. And I do so admire them. But I cannot altogether admire them. For they are evidences also that Marx was *caught in a trap*: the trap baited by 'Political Economy.' Or, more accurately, he had been sucked into a theoretical whirlpool, and, however manfully he beats his arms and swims against the circulating currents, he slowly revolves around a vortex which threatens to engulf him. Value, capital, labour, money, value, reappear again and again, are interrogated, re-categorised, only to come round once more on the revolving currents in the same old forms, for the same interrogation.⁵⁶ Nor am I even able to agree that it *had* to be like this, that Marx's thought could only have been developed in this way. When one considers the philosophical breakthrough of the 1840s, and the propositions which inform the *German Ideology* and *Communist Manifesto*, there would appear to be indications of stasis, and even regression, in the next fifteen years. Despite the significance of the *economic* encounter in the *Grundrisse*, and despite the rich hypotheses which appear in its interstices (as to pre-capitalist formations, etc.), there is something in Marx's encounter with Political Economy which is obsessive.

For what was this 'Political Economy'? It did not offer a total

account of society or of its history; or, if it pretended to do so, then its conclusions were entailed in its premises. These premises proposed that it was possible, not only to identify particular activities as 'economic', but to isolate these as a special field of study from the other activities (political, religious, legal, 'moral' – as the area of norms and values was then defined – cultural, etc.); where such isolation proved to be impossible, as in the impingement of 'politics' or 'law' upon 'economic' activity, then such impingement might be seen as improper interference with 'natural' economic process, or as second-order problems, or as the fulfilment of economic goals by other means.

It might also be proposed (although not necessarily) that economics, and, with Malthus, demography, were first-order problems, and that these determined (or, in a 'free' state, should and would determine) social development as a whole. These 'underlay' the elaborate superstructures of civilization, determining the wealth of nations and the pace and direction of 'progress.' Thus isolated, economic activities became the object of a 'science', whose primary postulates were interests and needs: self-interest at a micro-level, the interests of groups ('agriculture' and 'industry') or even of classes ('Labour' and 'Capital') at a macro-level, the groups and classes being defined according to the economic premises of the science. To develop such a science with rigor demanded accurate definition and fixity of categories, a mathematical logic, and the continuous internal circulation and recognition of its own concepts: its conclusions were acclaimed as 'laws'.

This is the structure of 'Political Economy.' From the outside, in the 1840s, it appeared to Marx as ideology, or, worse, apologetics. He entered within it in order to overthrow it. But, once inside, however many of its categories he fractured (and how many times), the structure remained. For the premises supposed that it was possible to isolate economic activities in this way, and to develop these as a first-order science of *society*. It is more accurate to say that Marx, at the time of the *Grundrisse*, did not so much remain within the structure of

'Political Economy' as develop an *anti*-structure, but within its same premises. The postulates ceased to be the self-interest of men and became the logic and forms of capital, to which men were subordinated; capital was disclosed, not as the benign donor of benefits, but as the appropriator of surplus labour; factional 'interests' were disclosed as antagonistic classes; and contradiction displaced the sum progress. But what we have at the end, is not the overthrow of 'Political Economy' but *another* 'Political Economy'.⁵⁷

Insofar as Marx's categories were anti-categories, Marxism was marked, at a critical stage in its development, by the categories of Political Economy: the chief of which was the notion of the 'economic', as a first-order activity, capable of isolation in this way, as the object of a science giving rise to laws whose operation would over-ride second-order activities. And there is another mark also, which it is difficult to identify without appearing to be absurd. But the absurdities to which this error has been taken in the work of Althusser and his colleagues – that is, the absurdities of a certain kind of static self-circulating 'Marxist' structuralism – enable us to risk the ridicule. There is an important sense in which the movement of Marx's thought, in the *Grundrisse*, is locked inside a *static, anti-historical structure*.

When we recall that Marx and Engels ceaselessly ridiculed the pretensions of bourgeois economy to disclose 'fixed and eternal' laws, independent of historical specificity; when we recall the movement *within* the structure, the accumulation of capital, the declining rate of profit; and when we recall that Marx sketched, even in the *Grundrisse*, capital in terms of the development of its historical forms, then the proposition seems absurd. After all, Marx and Engels enabled historical materialism to be born. And yet the proposition has force. For once capital has emerged on the page, its self-development is determined by the innate logic inherent within the category, and the relations so entailed, in much the same way as 'the market' operates within bourgeois Political Economy, and still does so within some 'modernization theory' today. Capital is an operative category which laws its

own development, and capitalism is the effect, in social formations, of these laws. This mode of analysis must necessarily be anti-historical, since the actual history can only be seen as the expression of ulterior laws; and historical evidence, or contemporary (empirically-derived) evidence, will then be seen as Althusser sees it, as instances or illustrations confirming these laws. But when capital and its relations are seen as a structure, in a given moment of capital's forms, then this structure has a categorical stasis: that is, it can allow for no impingement of any influence from any other region (any region not allowed for in the terms and discourse of this discipline) which could modify its relations, for this would threaten the integrity and fixity of the categories themselves.

This is an extraordinary mode of thought to find in a materialist, for capital has become Idea, which unfolds itself in history. We remember so well Marx's imprecations against idealism, and his claims to have inverted Hegel, that we do not allow ourselves to see what is patently there. In the *Grundrisse* – and not once or twice, but in the whole mode of presentation – we have examples of *unreconstructed* Hegelianism. Capital posits conditions '*in accordance with its immanent essence*',⁵⁸ reminding us that Marx had studied Hegel's Philosophy of Nature, and had noted of 'the Idea as nature' that 'reality is posited with immanent determinateness of form.'⁵⁹ Capital posits this and that, creates this and that, and if we are to conceive of capitalism ('the inner construction of modern society') it can only be as 'capital in the totality of its relations.'⁶⁰

It is true that Marx reminds us (or is he reminding himself?) that 'the new forces of production and relations of production' of capital 'do not develop out of *nothing* . . . nor from the womb of the self-positing Idea.' But he goes on, immediately, to add:

While in the complicated bourgeois system every economic relation presupposes every other in its bourgeois economic form, and everything posited is thus also a presupposition, this is the case with every organic system. This organic system itself, as a totality, has its presuppositions, and its development to its totality consists precisely in

subordinating all elements of society to itself, or in creating out of it the organs which it still lacks.⁶¹

The 'organic system' is then its own subject, and it is this anti-historical stasis or *closure* which I have been indicating. The 'it' inside this organism is capital, the soul of the organ, and 'it' subordinates all elements of society to itself and creates out of society 'its' own organs.

The point is not only that in the light of this kind of lapse Engels's warnings to Schmidt are necessary and salutary: concepts and economic laws have no reality 'except as approximation': 'Did feudalism ever correspond to its concepts?' There is a point of greater importance. For Marx has moved across an invisible conceptual line from *Capital* (an abstraction of Political Economy, which is his proper concern) to *capitalism* ('the complicated bourgeois system'), that is, the whole society, conceived of as an 'organic system.' But the whole society comprises many activities and relations (of power, of consciousness, sexual, cultural, normative) which are not the concern of Political Economy, which have been *defined out of* Political Economy, and for which it has no terms. Therefore Political Economy cannot show *capitalism* as 'capital in the totality of its relations': it has no language or terms to do this. Only a historical materialism which could bring all activities and relations within a coherent view could do this. And, in my view, subsequent historical materialism has *not* found this kind of 'organism', working out its own self-fulfilment with inexorable idealist logic, nor has it found any society which can be simply described as 'capital in the totality of its relations.' 'We' have *never* let it get so far as that: even Fascism, which might be offered as 'its' most ferocious manifestation, would then have to be glossed as an expression of its irrationality, not of its inherent rational logic. But historical materialism has found that Marx had a most profound intuition, an intuition which in fact *preceded* the *Grundrisse*: that the logic of capitalist process has found expression within all the activities of a society, and exerted a determining pressure upon its development and form:

hence entitling us to speak of capitalism, or of capitalist societies. But this is a very different conclusion, a critically different conclusion, which gives us an organicist structuralism on one side (ultimately an Idea of capital unfolding itself) and a real historical process on the other.

This is only a part of the *Grundrisse*, of course. And, of course, Marx conceived of himself, pugnaciously, as a materialist. In his introduction he vindicated his method, of proceeding from abstractions to the concrete in thought; and his method was largely vindicated in the results: only by the fiercest abstraction could he crack those categories apart. But he also discounted, in cavalier fashion, the inherent dangers of the method. Hegel went astray because, proceeding by this method, he 'fell into the illusion of conceiving the real as the product of thought unfolding itself out of itself.' It seemed so easy to cast this silly illusion aside, but to proceed by much the same method. But if Marx never forgot that thought was not self-generating but was 'a product, rather, of the working-up of observation and conception into concepts,'⁶² this mode of abstraction could still give him, on occasion, capital as the unfolding of its own idea.

I think that, for ten years, Marx *was* in this trap. His delays, his carbuncles, cannot all be attributed to the bourgeoisie. When he came to write *Capital* the trap had been in some part sprung. I am not expert enough to describe his partial self-deliverance, but I would suggest four considerations. First, the trap was never fully closed. Marx had conceived of *capitalism* in historical terms in the 1840s, continued to do so, by fits and starts, in the *Grundrisse*, and these were also years in which applied and concrete political analysis continued to flow from his pen. Second, and alongside this, he continued to develop, not only in his historical but also in his practical political experience, as a historical actor in his own part, and in observing the growth, flux and recession of working-class struggles in Europe. These two considerations are self-evident.

The other two may be more controversial. For the third, I would emphasize once again the important influence of *The*

Origin of Species (1859). I am aware that my admiration for Darwin is regarded as an amiable (or guilty) eccentricity, and that there is a general mind-set among progressive intellectuals which attributes to Darwin the sins of teleological evolutionism, positivism, social Malthusianism, and apologias for exploitation (the 'survival of the fittest') and of racism.⁶³ But I am not convinced of these objections, and, to be honest, I am not even convinced that all these critics have read *The Origin of Species*, nor read informed scientific evaluations of it. I know very well how Darwin's ideas were put to use by others, and I also know of his subsequent (rather few) lapses. But what is remarkable in his work is the way in which he argues through rigorously, and in an empirical mode, the logic of evolution which is *not* a teleology, whose conclusions are *not* entailed in their premises, but which is still subject to rational explanation.⁶⁴ In any case, my admiration, whether innocent or not, was certainly shared by Engels and Marx. Marx read the book in December 1860, and at once wrote to Engels: 'Although it is developed in the crude English style, this is the book which contains the basis in natural history for our view.' To Lassalle he wrote in the next month, the book 'is very important and serves me as a basis in natural science for the class struggle in history . . . Despite all deficiencies, not only is *the death-blow dealt here for the first time to 'teleology' in the natural sciences but their rational meaning is empirically explained.*'⁶⁵

There are two important recognitions here: first, Marx recognised, grudgingly, that the empirical method, however 'crude', however 'English', had educed a substantial contribution to knowledge; second, Marx recognised in the *non-teleological* explication of a rational logic in natural process 'a basis . . . for our view', indeed 'a basis in natural science for the class struggle in history.' There is surely a recognition here that this 'basis' had *not* been provided before (in the *Grundrisse*), and even the suggestion that Marx was aware that his abstractionist mode of procedure was not proof against such teleology? It is not that Marx supposed that Darwinian analogies could be taken unreconstructed from the animal to the human world: he very

soon reproved a correspondent who, with the aid of Malthus, was supposing that.⁶⁶ It is rather a question of method, in which Darwin's work was taken as exemplar of the rational explication of the logic of process, which, in new terms, must be developed in historical practice. And I cannot see that we have any licence to pass this off as some momentary fancy. Still, in 1873, Marx took the trouble to send to Darwin a copy of *Capital*, inscribed by him as a gift from 'his sincere admirer.'⁶⁷

It is at this time (1860) that the work of fashioning the *Grundrisse* into *Capital* commenced. And this leads me to my fourth consideration. It appears to me that Marx was more self-critical of his earlier work than many commentators allow. I will not delay to puzzle over the various hints that survive as to his own self-dissatisfaction.⁶⁸ But in my view the writing of *Capital* involved a radical re-structuring of his materials, in ways partly influenced by *The Origin of Species*. It is argued (for example, by Martin Nicolaus, the editor of the *Grundrisse*) that the changes may be attributed to Marx's desire to make his work more 'popular', more 'concrete', and hence more widely available to the revolutionary movement; but 'the *inner* structure of *Capital* is identical in the main lines to the *Grundrisse*.' In the first, 'the method is visible; in *Capital* it is deliberately, consciously hidden . . .' I do not think so. And I think even less of the attempt to explain away Marx's letter to Engels (15 August 1863), in which he writes of the slow progress of *Capital*, and explains that he has 'had to turn everything round', as meaning that 'he had to overthrow virtually all of previous Political Economy.' The phrase is this: 'when I look at this compilation now and see how I have had to turn everything round and how I had to make even the *historical* part out of material of which some was quite unknown': and it cannot bear this construction. The 'overthrow' of previous political economy had been done, already, in the notebooks (*Grundrisse*) of 1857-8; what was new was 'the historical part' and the 'turning around' of the rest.⁶⁹

This turning round, I am arguing, involved not only adding a historical dimension to the work, and much greater concrete exemplification (derived from empirical investigation) but also

attempting to bring under control and reduce to the rational explication of process the 'idealist' (even self-fulfilling, teleological) formulations derived from the abstractionist mode. What comes into *Capital*, in a new way, is a sense of history, and a concretion of exemplification (accompanied, we recall, by 'extraneous' expressions of wrath).

And yet Nicolaus is not wholly wrong; in some part – and that part specifically the anti-structure of 'Political Economy' – the structure of *Capital* remains that of the *Grundrisse*.⁷⁰ It remains a study of the logic of capital, not of capitalism, and the social and political dimensions of the history, the wrath, and the understanding of the class struggle arise from a region independent of the closed system of economic logic. In that sense *Capital* was – and probably had to be – a product of theoretical miscegenation. But miscegenation of this order is no more possible in theory than in the animal kingdom, for we cannot leap across the fixity of categories or of species. So that we are forced to agree with seven generations of critics: *Capital* is a mountainous inconsistency. As pure Political Economy it may be faulted for introducing external categories; its laws cannot be verified, and its predictions were wrong. As 'history' or as 'sociology' it is abstracted to a 'model', which has heuristic value, but which follows too obsequiously ahistorical economic laws.

Capital was not an exercise of a different order to that of mature bourgeois Political Economy, but a total confrontation within that order. As such, it is both the highest achievement of 'political economy', and it signals the need for its supersession by historical materialism. To say the former is not to diminish Marx's achievement, for it is only in the light of that achievement that we are able to make this judgement. But the achievement does not produce historical materialism, it provides the preconditions for its production. A unitary knowledge of society (which is always in motion, hence a historical knowledge) cannot be won from a 'science' which, as a presupposition of its discipline, isolates certain kinds of activity only for study, and provides no categories for others. And the

structure of *Capital* remains marked by the categories of his antagonist, notably *economy* itself. In this sense it is true that in *Capital* 'history' is introduced to provide exemplification and 'illustration' for a structure of theory which is not derived from this discipline. However reluctantly, we must go half-way towards the positions of Althusser and Balibar. But we need not go all the way, for these 'illustrations' would have been of no value if they were *wrong*, snatched from 'history's' received accounts, and not both researched ('I had to make even the *historical* part out of material of which some was quite unknown') and interrogated in new ways.

It is more true to say that the history in *Capital*, and in attendant writings, is immensely fruitful as *hypothesis*, and yet as hypothesis which calls in question, again and again, the adequacy of the categories of Political Economy. We find here a veritable cornucopia of hypotheses, informed by consistent theoretical propositions (the determining pressures of the mode of production), hypotheses which historical materialism has been setting to work ever since. But setting them to work has not involved only 'testing' them or 'verifying' them,⁷¹ it has also entailed revising and replacing them. Even Marx's more elaborated historical hypotheses (for example, as to the struggle to lengthen the working day, or as to the enclosure movement in England and its relation to labour supply for industry), as well as his more cryptic or more complex hypotheses (for example, as to the transition from feudalism to capitalism, or as to the British 'bourgeois revolution', or as to 'oriental despotism' and the 'Asiatic mode of production') have always undergone, in historical materialism's own discourse of the proof, either reformation or very much more radical change.⁷²

How could it be otherwise? To suppose differently would be to suppose, not only that everything can be said at once, but that immanent Theory (or Knowledge) found its miraculous embodiment in Marx, not fully mature to be sure (it had yet to develop to Althusser's full stature), but already perfectly-formed and justly-proportioned in all its parts. This is a fairy-story, recited to children in Soviet primary classes, and not even

believed by them. *Capital*, volume I, is rich in historical hypotheses; volumes II and III are less so; the 'anti-structure' of Political Economy narrows once again.⁷³ Marx's hope of himself developing historical materialism in practice remained, very largely, unfulfilled. It was left to the old clown, Frederick Engels, to make some attempts to remedy that; and his essay in historical anthropology, *The Origin of the Family* (Darwin's influence again!) is generally taken by Marxist anthropologists today to exemplify the infancy rather than the maturity of their knowledge.

In his final years, Engels looked around in alarm and noted the gathering consequences of their great omission. There are 'many allusions' to the theory of historical materialism in *Capital* (he wrote to Bloch in 1890), and 'Marx hardly wrote anything in which it did not play a part.' But he wrote nothing in which it played a leading part, and Bloch was directed to *Anti-Dühring* and *Ludwig Feuerbach* as the places in which might be found 'the most detailed account of historical materialism which, so far as I know, exists.' And, in the same year, to Conrad Schmidt, 'All history must be studied afresh, the conditions of existence of the different formations of society must be individually examined before the attempt is made to deduce from them the political, civil-legal, aesthetic, philosophic, religious, etc., notions corresponding to them. Only a little has been done here up to now ...'

It is sobering to reflect upon how many human activities (for none of which Political Economy afforded categories) are comprised within this sentence. But Engels was in an increasingly sober mood:

Too many of the younger Germans simply make use of the phrase, historical materialism (and *everything* can be turned into a phrase), in order to get their own relatively scanty historical knowledge (for economic history is still in its cradle!) fitted together into a neat system as quickly as possible, and then they think themselves something very tremendous.

So that not only historical materialism, but the region of it most immediately proximate to *Capital*, economic history, Engels could see to be 'still in its cradle.' It now seemed to him, with gathering urgency, that what was wrong with Marx's uncompleted life-work, *Capital*, was that it was not historical *enough*. To Mehring, in 1893:

There is only one other point lacking, which, however, Marx and I always failed to stress enough in our writings and in regard to which we are all equally guilty. We all, that is to say, laid and were bound to lay the main emphasis at first on the derivation of political, juridical and other ideological notions, and of the actions arising through the medium of these notions, from basic economic facts. But in so doing we neglected the formal side – the way in which these notions come about – for the sake of the content.

'It is the old story,' Engels continued: 'Form is always neglected at first for content.' But this failure had given purchase to the criticisms of 'the ideologists', with their –

Fatuous notion ... that because we deny an independent historical development to the various ideological spheres which play a part in history we also deny them any effect in history. The basis of this is the common undialectical conception of cause and effect as rigidly opposite poles, the total disregarding of interaction ...

The letters are familiar, and it may be wondered why I rehearse them. I do this now to emphasise, first, that Engels clearly acknowledged that Marx had *assumed* a theory of historical materialism which he had neither fully posed nor begun to develop. For some part of its proposition we are, indeed, dependent upon Engels's late letters. Althusser ridicules these letters, but we should note a curiosity in the fact that he can, in the same moment, borrow notions ('relative autonomy,' 'in-the-last-instance determination') of central importance to his thought from passages which lie cheek-by-jowl in the same letters which he lampoons. I will add that these letters were as familiar to me and to fellow practitioners in historical materialism in 1948 as in 1978, and that this was where we started

from. We did not have to wait upon Althusser to learn that the critical problems lay in the area of 'relative autonomy', etc.; these phrases pointed towards the problems which we then set out in our practice to examine. I will come back to this question, since it indicates a very different Marxist tradition from that of Althusser.

The second reason for rehearsing these letters is that we find in them that Engels is (as I think) correctly indicating the area of the largest (and most dangerous and ambiguous) of the real silences left by Marx's death – and shortly to be sealed by his own. But in the same moment, in the very terms in which he discusses this absent theory he reveals the inadequacy of its terms. For 'political, juridical and other ideological notions' cannot be derived from 'economic facts' within a discourse of Political Economy so exacting that its very definitions of the 'economic' affords to these extraneous evidences no entry. And the notion that the concepts of Marxism should be historical categories and 'subject to change and transformation' would play havoc with the credentials of Marxism as an exact 'science' of the capitalist mode of production. So that Engels is saying, in effect, that historical materialism and Marxist Political Economy have failed to find a common junction and a theoretical vocabulary capable of encompassing both process and structure; that Marxism is in danger of becoming imprisoned within the categories of *Capital*; but that the pressure of incipient historical materialism can be seen within its structure (in its inconsistencies as much as its hypotheses), which pressure he could authenticate (from Marx's other work and from their long common project). He wished, in these final letters, to give to historical materialism a charter of liberation from the structure of the old *Grundrisse*, but he could not solve the theoretical problems thus entailed nor find the terms to do so. Subsequent historical materialism, in its practice – although insufficiently in its theory – has sought to serve under this charter of liberation. Althusser and his colleagues seek to thrust historical materialism back into the prison of the categories of Political Economy.

I think that contemporary Marxist economists are right to note that 'in *Capital* . . . Marx repeatedly uses the concept of the circuit of capital to characterise the structure of the capitalist economy' – and, more than that, of capitalist society more generally.⁷⁴ But historical materialism (as assumed as hypothesis by Marx, and as subsequently developed in our practice) must be concerned with other 'circuits' also: the circuits of power, of the reproduction of ideology, etc., and these belong to a different logic and to other categories. Moreover, historical analysis does not allow for static contemplation of 'circuits', but is immersed in moments when all systems go and every circuit sparks across the other. So that Engels is in this sense wrong: it is not true that he and Marx 'neglected the formal side – the way in which these notions come about – for the sake of the content.' It was, rather, the over-development of the formal side, in the 'anti-structure' of Political Economy, which in its genesis and form was derived from a bourgeois construction, and which confined the real historical content into impermissible and unpassable forms.

Our concern must now be to approach this problem from a different aspect: the alternative heuristics of 'structure' and of 'process.' But, first, may we take a brief adieu of our old clown? It is now *de rigueur* to make old Engels into a whipping boy, and to impugn to him any sign that one chooses to impugn to subsequent Marxisms. All this has now been written out, and by many hands, and I need not go over it all again.⁷⁵ I am willing to agree that several of the charges stick. Thus I think it is true that in his writings i) Engels gave credibility to epistemological 'reflection theory',⁷⁶ ii) he introduced a paradigm of 'natural process' (a misapplied Darwinism) in his anthropological and historical work, which drifted towards a positive evolutionism, iii) he certainly introduced – as did, with equal certainty, Marx – historicist notions of lawed and pre-determined development. These are heavy charges, although I cannot accept the pleadings which always find Marx and Lenin innocent and leave Engels alone in the dock. And to these I have added my own, more marginal, charges, as to Engels's unfortunate and ill-considered

influence in the formative British socialist movement.⁷⁷ But when all this has been said, what an extraordinary, dedicated and versatile man he was! How closely he followed his own times, how far he risked himself – further, often, than Marx – in engagements with his contemporary historical and cultural thought, how deeply and passionately he was engaged in a movement which was spreading to the five continents, how generously he gave himself in his last years to the paper of his old friend and to the incessant correspondence of the movement! If we must learn, on occasion, from his errors, then he would have expected this to be so. And it is, least of all, for the ‘revisionist’ letters of his last decade that he is to be cast as a whipping-boy.

It is taken to be a truism by the young that older is worse than younger, but I cannot see that Engels exemplifies that general case. The ‘General’, in his last decade, did not renege upon the propositions of his youth; rather, he dwelt nostalgically upon ‘the salad days’ of the 1840s, and in the wisdom and foreboding of age he noted that there was something in the young movement of the 1880s and 1890s which was turning away from the intuitions of his and Marx’s original theses. If he is to be punished, he should be punished for these late letters of qualification and of warning least of all. That the letters proposed, but did not answer, many problems can be agreed; but if the warnings had been fully attended to, then the history of Marxism might have been different. I will not allow Frederick Engels to be cast as a senile clown after all. He should be taken, until his last year, as he would have wished: his great sanity, his errors, his breadth of understanding (but his excessive ‘family’ possessiveness) of the movement, all inter-mixed.

X

We will now discuss structure and process. It is customary at this point to launch into a long disquisition on the diachronic and the synchronic heuristics. But I hope that we may take this as read. However eloquent, the disquisition is likely to leave us

with the conclusion that *both* heuristics are valid and necessary. I must make it clear, without equivocation, that in the argument which follows I am not disputing the necessity for synchronic procedures in social, economic and (on occasion) in historical analysis. Such procedures (a general view of a whole society, ‘frozen’ at a certain moment, or a systematic isolation from the whole of certain selected activities) have always been employed by historians, and a glance down the volumes of our ‘trade’ journals (for example, *Past and Present* or *Annales E.S.C.* or the *Economic History Review*) will show that specialist synchronic vocabularies have been brought to interrogate ‘history’ more frequently in the last three decades than at any previous period.

Historical materialism offers to study social process in its totality; that is, it offers to do this when it appears, not as another ‘sectoral’ history – as economic, political, intellectual history, as history of labour, or as ‘social history’ defined as yet another sector⁷⁸ – but as a total history of society, in which all other sectoral histories are convened. It offers to show in what determinate ways each activity was related to the other, the logic of this process and the rationality of causation. We need only to state this claim to note two observations which must at once follow upon it. First, historical materialism must, in this sense, be the discipline in which all other human disciplines meet. It is the unitary discipline, which must always keep watch over the isolating premises of other disciplines (and the fictional stasis entailed by the freezing of process in yet others), but whose maturity can only consist in its openness towards and its summation of the findings of those other disciplines. So – ‘History’ must be put back upon her throne as the Queen of the humanities, even if she has sometimes proved to be rather deaf to some of her subjects (notably anthropology), and gullible towards favourite courtiers (such as econometrics). But, second, and to curb her imperialist pretensions, we should also observe that ‘History’, insofar as it is most unitary and general of all human disciplines, must always be the *least* precise. Her knowledge will never be, in however many thousand years, anything more than proximate. If she makes claims to be a

precise science these are wholly spurious. But (as I have sufficiently argued) her knowledge remains knowledge, and it is attained through its own rigorous procedures of historical logic, its own discourse of the proof.

As we have seen, the credentials of historical materialism have, in the last decades, come under sustained and ferocious assault; and this assault has been mounted equally from positions within orthodox 'bourgeois' academic disciplines (epistemology, sociology, etc.), from enclaves within the historical profession itself (genuine empiricism, quantitative positivism, etc.), and from a 'Marxist' structuralism. And, as with epistemology, what distinguishes all these attacks – and what should be taken note of by Marxist philosophers and sociologists – is the *similarity* of their forms, their modes of argumentation and their conclusions. All commence by questioning the knowability of process, as a total logic of change of sets of inter-related activities, and end up by tilting the vocabularies of knowledge very heavily (even absolutely) towards synchronic rather than diachronic procedures. The diachronic is waived away as mere unstructured 'narrative', an unintelligible flow of one thing from another. Only the stasis of structural analysis can disclose knowledge. The flow of events ('historicist time') is an empiricist fable. The logic of process is disallowed.

Before approaching this more closely I will stand back for a moment and take a historical perspective on this problem: for it seems to me that the rise of structuralism has real roots in historical experience, and that this drift of the modern mind must be seen to be, in some part, a drift of *ideology*. Structuralism may indeed be seen as the illusion of this epoch, just as evolutionism ('progress') and voluntarism have characterised earlier moments in this century. Evolutionism was a 'natural' ideological confusion within the socialist movement in the decades preceding the First World War. Year by year (with minor 'set-backs') the movement was gathering force, new adhesions were announced to the International, trade union and

party membership enlarged, more socialist deputies were elected. As Walter Benjamin was to comment:

Nothing has corrupted the German working class so much as the notion that it was moving with the current. It regarded technological developments as the fall of the stream with which it was moving. From there it was but a step to the illusion that the factory work which was supposed to tend toward technological progress constituted a political achievement.⁷⁹

Marxism was hence infiltrated by the vocabulary (and even premises) of economic and technical 'progress' – which in Britain meant the vocabulary of utilitarianism – and of an evolutionism which borrowed improperly from the natural sciences and Darwinism. In bad times and adversity, militants might still uphold their cause by means of an evolutionism which, as Gramsci showed, was compressed into a kind of determinist stamina: 'history' was on their side, and they would be vindicated in the end. While the First World War offered to this evolutionism a check, the October revolution gave to it a new and more utopian incarnation. Utopianism (in its customary Marxist denigratory notation⁸⁰) has an astonishing and flourishing reincarnation within Marxism itself, in the form of a prettified and wholly fictional projection of 'the Soviet Union': to outsiders this utopia was offered as the emblem of their own future 'history', their own glorious and inexorable future.

This evolutionism (and its vocabulary) persisted, of course, and notably in the former colonial world, where 'evolution', once again, seemed to be the ally of the militants: I have found the vocabulary (although fiercely disputed) still vigorous among Marxists in India today. But I think that there were ways in which the decade, 1936–46, gave to it a sharp check. Marxism, in the decisive emergencies of Fascist insurgence and of the Second World War, began to acquire the accents of voluntarism. Its vocabulary took on – as in Russia after 1917 it had taken on – more of the active verbs of agency, choice, individual initiative, resistance, heroism and sacrifice. Victory in those emergencies no longer seemed to be in the course of 'evolution': far from it.

The very conditions of war and repression – the dispersal of militants into armies, concentration camps, partisan detachments, underground organisations, even isolated positions – threw squarely upon them as individuals the necessity for political judgement and active initiation. It seemed, as the partisan detachment blew up the crucial railway bridge, that they were ‘making history’; it seemed, as the women endured the bombs or as the soldiers stood with their backs to Stalingrad, that ‘history’ depended on their endurance. It was a decade of heroes; and there were Guevaras in every street and in every wood. The vocabulary of Marxism became infiltrated from a new direction: that of authentic liberalism (the choices of the autonomous individual) and perhaps also of Romanticism (the rebellion of spirit against the rules of fact). Poetry, rather than natural science or sociology, was welcomed as a cousin. It was all very disgusting, and, as events were to prove, futile. All that it left were the bones of our more heroic brothers and sisters to bleach on the plains of the past under a hallucinated utopian sun. And, to be sure (although a small matter) a war – a necessary and historic confrontation – that was won. But I cannot disclaim the fact that my own vocabulary and sensibility was marked by this disgraceful formative moment. Even now I must hold myself steady as I feel myself revert to the poetry of voluntarism. It is a sad confession, but I prefer it even today to the ‘scientific’ vocabulary of structuralism.

The vocabulary of voluntarism survived for a little longer. It was done in technicolour in the Soviet epics of the Great Patriotic War. Once again, it survived longest, and with most justice and authenticity, in the colonial and – thence – the ‘Third World.’ This or that political or military action against the imperialists could still command heroism, summon up initiatives, demand choices, and be felt as ‘making history.’ The poetry arose in a late flaring of intensity in Cuba. And, as with evolutionism, voluntarism could even co-exist with adversity for a little while: for it was only by rebellion against the overwhelming presence of ‘established fact’ that people could assert their humanity.⁸¹ But in the past two decades both

evolutionism and voluntarism have lost their nerve and have fallen silent, notably in the West. The vocabulary of structuralism has pushed all else aside.

And is this, now, at last the truth, the true Marxist vocabulary, restored to the original of Marx? We will examine this in its own terms in a moment. But our historical perspective must be continued until we come closer to our own self-knowledge. Voluntarism crashed against the wall of the Cold War. No account can convey the sickening jerk of deceleration between 1945 and 1948. Even in this country the Marxist Left seemed to be moving with ‘the fall of the stream’ in 1945; in 1948 it was struggling to survive amidst an antagonistic current. In Eastern Europe that same sickening jerk stopped the hearts of Masaryk, Kostov and of Rajk. In the West our heads were thrown against the windscreen of capitalist society; and that screen felt like – *a structure*. ‘History’, so pliant to the heroic will in 1943 and 1944, seemed to congeal in an instant into two monstrous antagonistic structures, each of which allowed only the smallest latitude of movement within its operative realm. For more than two decades each impulse towards independent forward movement within either realm (Hungary 1956, Prague 1968, Chile 1973) has been suppressed with a brutality which has confirmed the paradigm of structural stasis. Even in those parts of the Third World, where the rival structures operate only by diplomatic, economic and ideological extension, the same field-of-force has been exerted. Only the immense and enigmatic presence of China has escaped (at the cost of self-isolation) from this structural stasis.

This mutual confrontation of imperial structures is without historical precedent: not even Christendom and Ottoman Empire confronted each other (save at their rubbing edges) so massively, so watchfully, with such all-pervasive ideological refraction. In the West the ‘natural’ flow of social process coagulated to a thin stream of hesitant reformism (each individual reform achieved after immensely disproportionate effort). This at its best; more often, the regenerated capitalist mode of production simply co-opted and assimilated those reforms (the

product of earlier struggles), assigned to them new functions, developed them as 'organs' of its own. Or this is how it *seemed*: for, please note, in moving towards our present time, I have already, as if involuntarily, fallen into the vocabulary of structuralism, and reified a process which, however confusedly, was still the outcome of human choices and struggles. For this is my point: the vocabulary of structuralism was given by the seeming 'common sense', the manifest appearances, of three decades of Cold War stasis. And in its most pervasive accents, this has been a *bourgeois* vocabulary, an apologia for the *status quo* and an invective against 'utopian' and 'mal-adjusted' heretics. By the 1950s structuralisms – sometimes the product of lonely minds working in prior contexts – were flowing *with* the stream, and replicating themselves on every side as ideology: psychology was preoccupied with 'adjustment' to 'normality', sociology with 'adjustment' to a self-regulating social system, or within defining heretics as 'deviants' from 'the value-system' of the consensus, political theory with the circuits of psephology.⁸² In the end, more ambitious and more sophisticated structuralisms have come into fashion. The vocabularies of structuralism have been borrowed, not from natural science or from poetry, but now from sociology, now from linguistics and anthropology, and now from the anti-structure of Marxist Political Economy – the '*Grundrisse* face' of Marx.

I must guard myself against a misunderstanding. When I speak of vocabularies in this sense, it is, very certainly, in their sense as ideology. That is, I have argued that in each of these periods there has been a pressure of real experience which has seemed to licence the adoption of a particular language of social and political analysis, an ideological predisposition towards one vocabulary or another. This ought to put us on our guard. The experiences of the decades before the First World War predisposed minds to adopt the premises and terms of evolutionism; the crisis years of 1917 and of 1936–46 were, like all revolutionary moments, propitious for the premises and terms of voluntarism; and the unprecedented stasis and, in the profoundest sense, historical conservatism (the continuous

reproduction of material goods and of ideology within a seemingly-closed circuit) markedly dispose contemporary minds towards the premises and terms of structuralism. In this sense, a historian recognises in structuralism an analogy within the circulatory or clock-work-impelled justificatory systems of prior societies, and notes that these were generally *ancien régimes* anxious to validate established power or middle-aged post-revolutionary regimes, anxious to consolidate power with an ideological apologia. So – a historian, confronting structuralism, must sniff the air and scent a conservatism.

But this sniffing of the ideological air does not end the question. For, first, the very fact of this ideological predisposition is itself a kind of guarantee that the ideas in question have some partial correspondence to the historical moment: there *was* a 'progress' of the labour movement before the First World War, there *were* heroic initiatives and acts of will between 1936 and 1946, there *is* a profound sociological conservatism around us on each side today. So that we must recall that ideology has its own kind of 'truth.' And, second, an ideological predisposition to accept a particular vocabulary does not, of course, in itself expose that language, its premises and terms, to be invalid. That must be the object of a distinct enquiry. One day a 'conjuncture' may arrive when thousands of minds are simultaneously predisposed to believe – the truth! To be sure, historians know no records of such events. But perhaps, with Althusser, this utopian conjuncture has now at last arrived?

But let us first, before returning to Althusser, delay to admire another structuralism of our time, albeit one that is a little faded and unfashionable today. It falls to my hand because it happens to be a somewhat rare and audacious exercise, an attempt to replace structure within the historical record and to surmount the most difficult theoretical problem of any such system, the analysis of change through time. Let us first of all move directly to its vocabulary:

From the industrial perspective the cotton-textile revolution appears as a dramatic rearrangement of all the factors of production. The

revolution originated with a series of dissatisfactions legitimized by the dominant value-system of the day. In several sequences of differentiation the industry emerged with a structure more adequate to meet the demands of the foreign and domestic markets. Such a revolution naturally did not occur in a vacuum. It was initiated by non-economic elements such as religious values, political arrangements, and social stratification. At the same time, the industrial revolution in cotton created a *source of dissatisfaction*, which, when combined with other elements, initiated several sequences of differentiation in other social sub-systems.⁸³

I don't have time here to enter closely into argument with Professor Smelser as to his use of sources, his selection and interpretation of these, nor as to the emptiness of his 'boxes.' I wish now only to point to the reification of process entailed by the very vocabulary of analysis. Systems and sub-systems, elements and structures, are drilled up and down the pages pretending to be people. Smelser is anxious to show that social process occurred rationally and in an approved Parsonian fashion. There is a self-regulating social system (whose wisdom always appears most apparent if you happen to be at the top of it), 'governed' by a value-system (which, again, is enshrined in the institutions and attitudes of the system's governors), directed to goals legitimized by this value-system, which, when any major element within it differentiates structurally is precipitated into disequilibrium, resulting in dissatisfactions (always grossly misunderstood by those at the bottom, who, when they suffer, manifest 'negative emotional reactions' and 'unjustified disturbance symptoms'), but even these plebeian manifestations of irrationality the system is able to turn to functional account, since various superior non-economic 'elements' somewhere at the top of the system (such as 'political arrangements' or superior religious values or more simply the army and the police) 'handle and channel' these disturbance symptoms, and, if the system's organs should flash out a 'justified' signal, devise, through several refined 'steps', 'new ideas' or institutions (which however are always devised in forms more wise than those agitated for by the deluded sources of disturbance) – thereby

bringing to the structurally-differentiated 'system' a glorious return in 'an extraordinary growth of production, capitalization and profits,' which, however, in the end falls short of the goals prescribed by the dominative value-system, thereby producing new dissatisfactions which in turn . . . I don't know how to extricate myself from this sentence, since the Parsonian system has indeed unlocked the secret of perpetual motion.

In this system there are no good or evil men; or, rather, all men are of equally neuter will, their wills surrendered into the inexorable will of social process. They are (or should be) the *träger* or supports of that process. The social will is beneficent: 'the industry emerged with a structure more adequate to meet the demands of . . . markets.' And I have done Smelser an injustice in suggesting that he sees men and women only as inert passengers in this differentiating mechanism of reification. *Left to itself* the system would move us all forward to meet the goal of larger markets. But unfortunately the 'disturbance-symptoms' of the majority of those being moved are not only unjustified in minor ways but are often hugely unjustified. They become Luddites, trade unionists, Peterloo and Ten Hour Men, Chartists. They impede the thing-society from proceeding smoothly down its thing-ways to its thing-conclusion. It is fortunate that in contemporary societies we have sociologists who can explain to the disturbed that their symptoms are unjustified, and who can advise 'political arrangements' as to the best means of 'handling and channelling.' We all now know that phenomena which to the uninformed eye (or stomach) might appear as justified cause for disturbance are in fact manifestations of the ulterior working-out of a wisdom-thing. And behind this again one may glimpse an ancient theological form of thought: every phenomenon *must*, as an evidence of the Divine will, have a function.

Of course the Smelserian system's pretence of transcending the insertion into 'history' of intention and of norms is wholly specious. We have in this system, and at every stage, the imposition of exterior value. This is nowhere more clear than in Smelser's handling of the value-system, whether as generalised

concept or in relation to particular social groups, such as the handloom weavers. As theory he proposes this:

Every social system is governed by a value-system which specifies the nature of the system, its goals, and the means of attaining these goals. A social system's first functional requirement is to preserve the integrity of the value-system itself and to assure that individual actors conform to it. This involves socializing and educating individuals, as well as providing tension-control mechanisms for handling and resolving individual disturbances relating to the values.

This snake has, however, already got its tail deeply into its own mouth. For on the same page, Smelser has told us:

A social system . . . is governed by a value-system which defines and legitimizes the activities of the social system. Second, these values are institutionalized into regulatory patterns which govern the interaction of the more concrete units. Third, the more concrete units specialize in social sub-systems which cluster around functional imperatives governing the social system.

But also (on another page) the value-system in its own judge and arbitrator: 'it specifies the conditions under which members of the system should express dissatisfactions and prepare to undertake change.' Values alone lie outside this model of structural differentiation. If they change, they change 'more slowly than social structure,' and this is 'a separate analytical problem.'⁸⁴

This is a proper epistemological pudding. The first relation proposed between value-system and social system is symbiotic. The social system is 'governed' by the value-system, which, indeed, selects the system's goals; but equally the social system's 'first functional requirement is to preserve the integrity of the value-system.' Hence value-system and social system are mutually supportive, but of the two the first is prior. The first function of the social system is to reproduce in their integrity the values which govern it. This is where the snake got its tail into its mouth. Now it begins to swallow itself. For the social system is also made up of 'concrete units' (not, alas, as yet

people!), specialized in 'social sub-systems which cluster around functional imperatives governing the social system.' But we have already been informed as to what the *first* of these functional imperatives is: to preserve the integrity of the value-system. What is society? It is a value-system whose first function is, through the mediation of empty boxes and an ugly terminology, to reproduce its own value-system.

Who holds these values? If choice appears, who decides which sets of value are the dominant value-system? The snake – or what is left of it, for it is now a wriggling knot – has an answer to this too. The value-system which is dominant is exactly that which dominates. (It is not necessary to go further and say the values of those who hold political, economic and other institutional (e.g. religious, academic) *power*, since power has been tabulated somewhere among 'political arrangements' whose function is the attainment of goals selected by 'the' value-system). Moreover, the value-system itself 'specifies' whether dissatisfactions should or should not arise: that is, it actively inhibits alternative values from arising and provides 'tension-control mechanisms' for 'resolving individual disturbances relating to values.' Plop! The snake has disappeared into total theoretical vacuity.

It is, of course, a highly conservative vacuity: what is governs what is whose first function is to preserve the integrity of is-ness; what dominates has the functional imperative of preserving its own dominance. As presented by Smelser, this structural theory cannot be criticised in terms of alternative theories of process or of class conflict because the terminology of his theory is so fashioned that such concepts may not at any point be allowed to enter. The vocabulary excludes criticism before criticism can commence.

Nevertheless, as I have said, we have in this system, at every stage, the imposition of exterior value. There was not, of course, in the industrial history which Smelser offers to restructure *one* dominant value-system but many competing sets of value, one of which was dominant only because it was professed by men who held power. The values of Poor Law Commissioners and

of paupers, of Assistant Hand-Loom Weavers Commissioners and of weavers, can't be subsumed within the same system. And even if we attempt to do so, by gesturing at some vague notions like 'independence', we find that the social system is so structured that what makes for the independence of some men makes for the dependence of others. The 'social system' had no 'goal', no internalised intentionality, since the men and women within that system pursued opposing goals and intentions. Smelser has simply commenced analysis by assuming his own goal, which is the old one of Weberian rationalisation in pursuit of maximum economic growth. Deep within his thing-mechanism, masked but still at the controls, is Sombart's entrepreneur, a man of unimpeachable goodwill whose only motivation is to maximise his own profits and hence the productive resources of mankind. Here is the *primum mobile* of the capitalist system. And this is why Smelser's system, in its larger pretensions,⁸⁵ not only outrages the discourse of historical logic but is, as sociology, only to be understood as a moment of capitalist ideology.

As ideology it may, perhaps, be seen as the product of that moment of polarised ideological stasis at the height of the Cold War which I have already indicated.⁸⁶ It was also at this moment that Stalinism afforded a caricature of Marxism, which offered, in very different terminology but with an equally abstracted vocabulary, an identical reification of process, in which a 'superstructure' was reduced to confirming or legitimating a base. This 'base' (Stalin wrote in 1950) 'is the economic structure of society at a given stage of its development', and 'the superstructure consists of the political, legal, religious, artistic, and philosophical views of society and the political, legal, and other institutions corresponding to them:

The superstructure is a product of the base; but this does not mean that it merely reflects the base, that it is passive, neutral, indifferent to the fate of its base, to the fate of the classes, to the character of the system. On the contrary, no sooner does it arise than it becomes an exceedingly active force, actively assisting its base to take shape and consolidate itself, and doing everything it can to help the new system finish off and eliminate the old base and the old classes.

It cannot be otherwise. The base creates the superstructure precisely in order that it may serve it, that it may actively help it to take shape and consolidate itself, and that it may actively strive for the elimination of the old, moribund base and its old superstructure.

This appears to say: 'What is created what is whose first function is to consolidate its own is-ness – and also to clobber whatever was.' This is an approximate description of High Stalinism, in which the State was indeed 'an exceedingly active force' doing everything it could to 'finish off and eliminate the old base and the old classes,' although historians of the Soviet Union nourish a suspicion that at a certain stage the 'is' of Stalin's superstructure was artificially (and in a theoretically improper way) creating its own base. This consorts less easily with another of Stalin's remarkable formulations:

The superstructure is not directly connected with production, with man's productive activity. It is connected with production only indirectly through the economy, through the base. The superstructure therefore does not reflect changes of development of the productive forces immediately and directly, but only after changes in the base, through the prism of changes wrought in the base by the changes in production. This means that the sphere of action of the superstructure is narrow and restricted.⁸⁷

My point is not, in these latter days, to scrutinise Stalin's credentials as a Marxist theoretician. The present point is to note an identical reification of historical process in both Smelser and in Stalin, entailed in the premises and extending into the vocabulary of analysis: both offer (or pretend to offer) history as a 'process without a subject', both concur in the eviction from history of human agency (unless as the 'supports' or vectors of ulterior structural determinations), both present human consciousness and practices as self-motivated *things*.

There is a further point. The explicit concept of history as 'a process without a subject' is a discovery not of Smelser or of Stalin but of Althusser; and, moreover, he proposed that this is 'the basis of all the analyses in *Capital*.' (L. & P., 117; P. & A.,

182-5; *Essays*, 51). But we may surmise that the origin of this remarkable insight lay in Stalin's *Marxism and Linguistics*, a text for which Althusser has always shown unusual respect. We know that Althusser joined the French Communist Party in 1948, and felt himself to be, subjectively, confronting a great difficulty:

A professional philosopher who joins the Party remains, ideologically, a petty bourgeois. He must revolutionize his thought in order to occupy a proletarian class position in philosophy. (*L. & P.* 17)

In this difficulty, he cut his teeth on Stalin's 'original' contribution to theory (1950) which provided the 'first shock' which began to dislodge the sectarianism and dogmatism which characterised the Communist movement at his initiation. Or so he presents the event in retrospect – a 'period summed up in caricature by a single phrase, a banner flapping in the void: "bourgeois science, proletarian science".'

Paradoxically, it was no other than Stalin, whose contagious and implacable system of government and thought had induced this delirium, who reduced the madness to a little more reason. Reading between the lines of the few simple pages in which he reproached the zeal of those who were making strenuous efforts to prove language a superstructure, we could see that there were limits to the use of the class criterion, and that we had been made to treat science, a status claimed by every page of Marx, as merely the first-comer among ideologies. We had to retreat, and, in semi-disarray, return to first principles. (*F.M.*, 22, 27)⁸⁸

It is thus that he presents his own intellectual development: a 'petty bourgeois', initiated into Stalinist dogmatism, but rescued from its uttermost delirium – by Stalin. The rescue-operation left him, precisely, with the immanent concept of history as 'process without a subject'; with a re-ified structuralist vocabulary, with an inexorable and mechanical metaphor of basis and superstructure – and with a notion of Marxism as a 'science' which belonged to neither!

Althusser has, of course, subsequent to *Reading Capital*,

denied that his version of Marxism is a structuralism, even though he allows that 'the young pup . . . slipped between my legs.'⁸⁹ The argument, which turns largely upon certain structuralist notions of the 'combinatory', is not one which we intend to address. Instead, we will address directly his own text, its vocabulary, its premises and terms.

The critical concept of Althusserian sociological theory is that of a 'mode of production.' Few Marxists will object to this. We think, if we are historians, of – *production*: and of land, dues, rents, property, technologies, markets, capital, wages, and the like. But Althusser assumes all this and posts forward to the essence of the matter, the concept, the 'arrangement' of the 'terms':

On the one hand, the *structure* (the economic base: the forces of production and the relations of production); on the other, the *super-structure* (the State and all the legal, political and ideological forms).

So far, we have been guided by the firm hand of Stalin. But now we may improve upon him. Marx introduced 'a new conception of the relation between *determinant instances* in the structure-superstructure complex which constitutes the essence of any social formation.' (*F.M.*, 111) Althusser then throws himself into the posture of wrestling for the purity of Marxist science against four antagonists – 'economism and even *technologism*' (*F.M.*, 108), on one side, humanism and historicism on the other. The relation between basis and superstructure must be verbalised and sophisticated in new ways, introducing the concepts of structure-in-dominance, in-the-last-instance determination, and over-determination. Marx gives us 'two ends of the chain': 'on the one hand, *determination in the last instance by the (economic) mode of production*; on the other, *the relative autonomy of the superstructure and their specific effectivity*.' (*F.M.* 111) (Strictly speaking, these are not two ends of a chain, but two ways of saying the same thing, for what is determinant, but only in the last instance, must allow for the effectivity of other relatively autonomous effects in other instances.) But, Althusser

assures us, this determination, while ever-present, is only fictive, since 'from the first moment to the last, the lonely hour of the "last instance" never comes.' (FM. 113) The problem, then, which, to a historian, might appear to require further empirical investigation and elaboration, appears to Althusser as one which arises from the deficiency of '*the theory of the specific effectivity of the superstructures . . .*' (FM. 113) This he sets out to repair: 'and before the theory of their effectivity or simultaneously (for it is by formulating their effectivity that their *essence* can be attained) there must be elaboration of *the theory of the particular essence of the specific elements of the superstructure.*' (FM. 114)

One feels that 'formulations' of this order, which repeatedly attain to the dignity and special clarity of italics, must indeed prepare us for the unveiling of mystery. Nor are we disappointed. For we are introduced to a very great lady, who is not at all to be seen as a slender superstructure sitting on a somewhat large basis, but as a unitary figure, *La Structure à Dominante*. She is a 'totality', but not a spurious Hegelian or Sartreian totality: she is infinitely more 'definite and rigorous.' (FM. 203) What determines her existence and structures her dominant personality is, in the last instance, 'economic'; but since the last instance never arrives, it is courteous very often to overlook this material determination. It is impolite to keep on reminding a great lady that she is determined by her tummy. It is more helpful to characterise her by the contradictions in her temperament, and to examine these contradictions in their own right, instead of continually harping on the fact that they originate in a bad digestion.

If every contradiction is a contradiction in a complex whole structured in dominance, this complex whole cannot be envisaged without its contradictions, without their basically uneven relations. In other words, each contradiction, each essential articulation of the structure, and the general relation of the articulations in the structure in dominance, constitute so many conditions of the existence of the complex whole itself. This proposition is of the first importance. For it means that the structure of the whole and therefore the 'difference' of the essential contradictions and their structure in dominance, is the very existence of

the whole; that the 'difference' of the contradictions . . . is identical to the conditions of the existence of the complex whole. In plain terms this position implies that the 'secondary' contradictions are not the pure phenomena of the 'principal' contradiction, that the principal is not the essence and the secondaries so many of its phenomena, so much so that the principal contradiction might practically exist *without* the secondary contradictions, or without some of them, or might exist *before* or *after* them. On the contrary, it implies that the secondary contradictions are essential even to the existence of the principal contradiction, that they really constitute its condition of existence, just as the principal contradiction constitutes their condition of existence. As an example, take the complex structured whole that is society. (FM. 204-5)

Ah, yes. Let us take an example, even if a trivial one: 'society'. For 'in plain terms' we had even supposed that Althusser was going a long and windy way around to say that in any complex whole or organism all attributes must be taken together as one set; and if analysis identifies a 'principal contradiction' this is (a) inherent to its structure, and (b) does not thereby disallow subordinate contradictions. But 'society', it turns out, can be more rapidly despatched:

In it, the 'relations of production' are not the pure phenomena of the forces of production; they are also their condition of existence. The superstructure is not the pure phenomenon of the structure, it is also its condition of existence . . . Please do not misunderstand me: this mutual conditioning of the existence of the "contradictions" does not nullify the structure in dominance that reigns over the contradictions and in them (in this case, determination in the last instance by the economy). Despite its apparent circularity, this conditioning does not result in the destruction of the structure in domination that constitutes the complexity of the whole, and its unity. Quite the contrary, even within the reality of the conditions of existence of each contradiction, it is the manifestation of the structure in dominance that unifies the whole. *This reflection of the conditions of existence of the contradiction within itself, this reflection of the structure articulated in dominance that constitutes the unity of the complex whole within each contradiction, this is the most profound characteristic of the Marxist dialectic, the one I have tried recently to encapsulate in the concept of 'overdetermination'.* (FM. 205-6)

It is good to know that we have arrived at length at 'the most profound characteristic of the Marxist dialectic'; although we

have arrived by Althusser's characteristic idealist methods – from ideal premises we arrive at 'society', as an example! This reorganisation of vocabulary has been forced upon Althusser by the deficiencies of 'economism', which sees the relation between basis and superstructure in an analogy with clockwork mechanism:

It is '*economism*' (mechanism) and not the true Marxist tradition that sets up the hierarchy of instances once and for all, assigns each its essence and role and defines the universal meaning of their relations . . . It is economism that identifies eternally in advance the determinant-contradiction-in-the-last-instance with the *role* of the dominant contradiction, which for ever assimilates such and such an "aspect" (forces of production, economy, practice) to the principal *role*, and such and such another 'aspect' (relations of production, politics, ideology, theory) to the secondary *role* – whereas in real history determination in the last instance by the economy is exercised precisely in the permutations of the principal role between the economy, politics, theory, etc. (F.M. 213)

The concession as to 'real history' is welcome (and unusual) although practising historians can scarcely find the resolution at the end of that sentence to be enlightening. What Althusser appears to be saying is that 'economism' proposed a clockwork analogy which was both crude and disreputable: and he proposes instead to sophisticate the clockwork:

Unevenness is internal to a social formation because the structuration in dominance of the complex whole, this structural invariant, *is itself the precondition for the concrete variation of the contradictions* that constitute it, and therefore for their displacements, condensations and mutations, etc., and inversely because *this variation is the existence of that invariant*.

Uneven development 'is not external to contradiction, but constitutes its most intimate essence.' (F.M. 213) All this certainly sounds more reputable; we have got rid of Stalin's grandfather clock, which was increasingly coming to look like a rather ugly antique. But what we are left with is simply a new-styled, more complicated clock, with many more moving parts,

and these parts are not substantial components, derived from historical investigation (monetary systems, constitutions, norms, property-rights), but interpolated neologisms. The reorganisation has taken place, not in substantive analysis (theory interacting with enquiry), but in the vocabulary alone.

The reason why we are still left with clockwork (or philosophical *mechanism*) lies in the theory's character: as a structuralism. Very clearly, Althusser's system is more than a 'flirtation' with structuralist terms. It does not matter at all whether or not this system qualifies as a structuralism according to certain recent Parisian notations in linguistics, anthropology or psycho-analysis. What constitutes a structuralism, in a more general sense, is (i) that however many variables are introduced, and however complex their permutations, these variables maintain their original fixity as categories: with Smelser, the 'value-system', the factors of production, 'political arrangements', and (the motor) 'structural differentiation'; with Althusser, 'the economy', 'politics', 'ideology', and (the motor) 'class struggle.' Thus the categories are *categories of stasis*, even if they are then set in motion as moving-parts. (ii) Movement can only take place *within the closed field* of the system or structure; that is, however complex and mutually-reciprocating the motions of the parts, this movement is enclosed within the overall limits and determinations of the pre-given structure. For both these reasons, history *as process*, as open-ended and indeterminate eventuation – but not for that reason devoid of rational *logic* or of determining *pressures* – in which categories are defined in particular contexts but are continuously undergoing historical redefinition, and whose structure is not pre-given but protean, continually changing in form and in articulation – all this (which may be said to constitute far more truly 'the most profound characteristic of the Marxist dialectic') must be denied.

And we face here a very difficult problem, and a problem insuperable to those philosophers (or sociologists) who suppose that a 'formulation' is at a higher level than 'empirical' analysis, and that what is requisite is not theoretically-informed *knowledge*

but a 'theory of history.' For it is exceptionally difficult to verbalise as 'theory' history as process; and, in particular, no analogies derived from mechanical or organic mechanism, and no static structural reconstitution, can encompass the logic of indeterminate historical process, a process which remains subject to determinate pressures. In the last analysis, the logic of process can only be described in terms of historical analysis; no analogy derived from any other area can have any more than a limited, illustrative, metaphoric value (and often, as with basis and superstructure, a static and damaging one); 'history' may only be theorised in terms of its own properties. We may well agree that historical materialism should become more theoretically alert, both as to its procedures and its conclusions. But what requires interrogating and theorising is historical knowledge.

xi

We have by no means finished with the problem of structure and of process, nor with our commentary upon Althusser's propositions. But we may at this point attempt to view this problem in a different perspective, by stepping behind both Althusser and Marx, and situating ourselves in eighteenth-century Naples, with Giambattista Vico.

The concept of history as process raises at once the questions of intelligibility and intention. Each historical event is unique. But many events, widely separated in time and place, reveal, when brought into relation with each other, regularities of process. Vico, confronted with these regularities, struggled to define process in ways which foresaw simultaneously the anthropological discipline and historical materialism:

He proceeds to discuss the natural law of the peoples, and show at what certain times and in what determinate ways the customs were born that constitute the entire economy of this law. These are religions, languages, property rights, business transactions, orders, empires, laws, arms, trials, penalties, wars, peaces and alliances. And from the times and ways in which they were born he infers the eternal properties which

determine that the nature of each, that is the time and way of its origin, shall be such and not otherwise.⁹⁰

Vico was able, in a remarkable way, to hold in simultaneous suspension, without manifest contradiction, a Hegelian, a Marxist, and a structuralist (Lévi-Straussian variant) heuristic. With Hegel he described 'an ideal eternal history traversed in time by the history of every nation.' 'Uniform ideas originating among entire peoples unknown to each other must have a common ground of truth.' From one aspect, this uniformity can be seen as evidence of 'divine providence.' But this providence works its way out through naturalistic means: 'our Science proceeds by a severe analysis of human thoughts about the human necessities or utilities of social life, which are the two perennial springs of the natural law of nations':

Human choice, by its nature most uncertain, is made certain and determined by the common sense of men with respect to human needs or utilities . . .

And 'common sense' is 'judgement without reflection, shared by an entire class, an entire people, an entire nation, or the whole human race.' Hence from another aspect providence may be seen as necessity, human needs or utilities determining social consciousness in uniform ways. But the uniformity of this 'judgement without reflection' implies also a uniformity of mental structure:

The natural law of nations is coeval with the customs of the nations, conforming one with another in virtue of a common human sense . . .

And:

There must in the nature of human things be a mental language common to all nations, which uniformly grasps the substance of things feasible in human social life . . .⁹¹

So that, from a third aspect, we encounter the notion of a 'common mental language' and common structure of myth.

Since this mental language was given to man by divine providence, the circle of argument is closed.

Thus Vico is offering us history as a process *with* a subject, but this need not necessarily be a historicism. If 'divine providence' is taken as the subject (or as the ultimate directive agent) and humanity as vectors of divine will, then of course we are offered a historicist theology. But since this providence is worked out through natural determinations, then men and women can be seen to be the subjects or agents of their own history. And the ambiguity of Vico's term as usually translated as 'law' ('the natural law of nations', *diritto naturale delle gente*) has haunted historical materialism from this time forward. If we employ 'law' so as to entail pre-determination and prediction, we are open to 700 objections, some 650 of which have been patiently expounded by Sir Karl Popper. It is futile to deny that both Marx and Engels did, on occasion, employ 'law' in this sense; and when they do so, the objections may sometimes be upheld.⁹² But of course *law*, *droit*, *diritto*, are words with many inflexions and ambiguities of meaning, in a set which moves from *rule* by way of *regularity* to *direction*. Historical materialism, from the time of Vico, has been in search for a term which addresses the uniformities of customs, etc., the regularities of social formations, and analyses these not as lawed necessities nor as fortuitous coincidences but as shaping and directive pressures, indicative articulations of human practices. I have already suggested that the argument will be advanced if we discard the concept of 'law' and replace it with that of 'the logic of process.'⁹³

It is Vico's insight into this logic which sustains his position as a precursor of historical materialism. He saw clearly that the historical event is something quite distinct from the sum of individual goals and intentions:

It is true that men have themselves made this world of nations . . . , but this world without doubt has issued from a mind often diverse, at times quite contrary, and always superior to the particular ends that men had proposed to themselves; which narrow ends, made means to serve

wider ends, it has always employed to preserve the human race upon this earth. Men mean to gratify their bestial lust and abandon their offspring, and they inaugurate the chastity of marriage from which the families arise. The fathers mean to exercise without restraint their paternal power over their clients, and they subject them to the civil powers from which the cities arise. The reigning orders of nobles mean to abuse their lordly freedom over the plebians, and they are obliged to submit to the laws which establish popular liberty. The free peoples mean to shake off the yoke of their laws, and they become subject to monarchs . . . That which did all this was mind, for men did it with intelligence; it was not fate, for they did it by choice; not chance, for the results of their always so acting are perpetually the same.⁹⁴

I am directing attention not to Vico's own attempt to attribute to process a cyclical intelligibility, but to his superb expression of process. This is the point from which all sustained historical thought must start. It is to this point that Engels returned in his famous (perhaps one should say 'notorious', in view of Althusser's heavy-handed treatment of it)⁹⁵ letter to Bloch of September 1890: 'We make our own history, but in the first place under very definite presuppositions and conditions. Among these the economic ones are finally decisive . . .' How, then, can we be said to 'make our own history' if 'the economic movement finally asserts itself as necessary'? In proposing a solution, Engels quietly exchanges subjects, and replaces 'we make' with 'history makes itself':

History makes itself in such a way that the final result always arises from conflicts between many individual wills, of which each again has been made what it is by a host of particular conditions of life. Thus there are innumerable intersecting forces, an infinite parallelogram of forces which give rise to one resultant – the historical event. This again may itself be viewed as the product of a power which, taken as a whole, works *unconsciously* and without volition. For what each individual wills is obstructed by everyone else, and what emerges is something that no one willed. Thus past history proceeds in the manner of a natural process and is also essentially subject to the same laws of movement.

And in his conclusion, Engels attempts to bring the two alternative subjects into relationship. 'Individual wills' (i.e. 'we') 'do

not attain what they want, but are merged into a collective mean, a common resultant,' and yet 'each contributes to the resultant and is to this degree involved in it.'

Althusser has no patience with this 'whole futile construction' (FM. 121), which in some part of his critique he patently misreads.⁹⁶ But with other parts of his critique I find myself in unfamiliar agreement. I would phrase my objections rather differently, but at points we concur. 1) Engels has not offered a solution to the problem, but re-stated it in new terms. He has commenced with the proposition that economic presuppositions are 'finally decisive', and this is where he concludes. 2) On the way he has gathered in an infinitude of 'individual wills' whose agency, in the result, is cancelled out ('something that no one willed'). 3) The model of 'an infinite parallelogram of forces', derived from physics, obscures what it should clarify. 4) In adopting this model Engels has unconsciously fallen back upon 'the presuppositions of classical bourgeois ideology and bourgeois political economy' (FM. 124) – Adam Smith's sum of self-interest, Rousseau's general will.⁹⁷ But the historical 'resultant' cannot usefully be conceived as the involuntary product of the sum of an infinity of mutually-contradictory individual volitions, since these 'individual wills' are not de-structured atoms in collision but act with, upon, and against each other as *grouped* 'wills' – as families, communities, interests, and, above all, as classes. In this sense, Vico, who proposes not 'individual wills' but fathers/clients, nobles/plebians, free peoples/monarchs, has stated the problem of process better than Engels. And if Engels, in this hurried letter, had remembered his own thinking and writing on all this, then he would have offered not a re-statement of the problem but some indication of a resolution. For these 'individual wills', however 'particular' their 'conditions of life', have been conditioned in class ways; and if the historical resultant is then seen as the outcome of a collision of contradictory class interests and forces, then we may see how human agency gives rise to an involuntary result – 'the economic movement finally asserts itself as necessary' – and how we may say, at one and the same

time, that 'we make our own history' and 'history makes itself.'

I have, in these last sentences, departed a very long way from Althusser. We shall see how far in a moment. One or two of our local criticisms of the text are concurrent. But Althusser sees the whole construction as 'futile', because Engels has proposed a non-problem: if the 'economic movement' produces the historical result, then we should get on with the analysis of structures and dismiss 'individual wills.' The very notion of human agency is no more than 'the semblance of a problem for *bourgeois ideology*.' (FM. 126) I, on the contrary, consider that Engels has proposed a very critical problem (agency and process) and that, despite deficiencies, the general tendency of his meditation is helpful. At least he does not discount the crucial ambivalence of our human presence in our own history, part-subjects, part-objects, the voluntary agents of our own involuntary determinations. Four years before Engels wrote to Bloch, an English Communist had reflected upon the same problem, in his own very different idiom:

I pondered all these things, and how men fight and lose the battle, and the thing that they fought for comes about in spite of their defeat, and when it comes turns out not to be what they meant, and other men have to fight for what they meant under another name . . .⁹⁸

For William Morris the accent falls even more sharply upon agency; but men are seen as the ever-baffled and ever-resurgent agents of an unmastered history.

Since process ensued in regularities which did not conform to the actors' intentions, Vico saw history as issuing 'from a mind . . . always superior to the particular ends that men have proposed to themselves.' Engels was reduced to a metaphor which introduced analogies from positivist law: 'the historical event . . . may itself be viewed as the product of a power which . . . works unconsciously' (a reminder of Vico's divine providence); but, also, 'history makes itself' and 'proceeds in the manner of a natural process' (a reminder of Vico's necessity of 'human needs or utilities'). It is manifest that, when we say that

history is not only process but process with intelligible regularities and forms, the mind finds it difficult to resist the conclusion that history must therefore be *programmed* in some way (whether the programming be divine or 'natural'); and, again and again, we notice the attribution of extra-historical or teleological sequences and goals – goals to which process is seen to move *towards*: 'issuing from a mind', 'the product of a power', the realisation of a *potentia* immanent within the essence or at the origin of the process, which manifests itself in the 'development of forms.'⁹⁹ This attribution can certainly be resisted, and it is *not* entailed in the premises of process and of social formations. But neither Vico nor Engels succeeded always in resisting it; nor did Marx (in his '*Grundrisse* face'); nor, very certainly, does Althusser, despite his repeated polemics against 'historicism.'

Althusser's proffered solution is in two parts. First, he evicts human agency from history, which then becomes a 'process without a subject.' Human events *are* the process but human practice (and, still less, intentions, 'wills') contributes nothing to this process. So far from being original, this is a very ancient mode of thought: process is fate. But if a human process without a (human) subject appears, nevertheless, to be not wholly fortuitous – a mere outcome of random collisions – but to be shaped and patterned in ways intelligible to humans, then, by an equally ancient mode of thought, it must be seen as being *willed*, being subject to some extra-human compulsion: Providence, the Divine Will, the Idea, evolutionary Destiny, Necessity.

Althusser wishes to expel such teleologies ('historicism'). So, in his second part, he evicts process from history. Rather like a medieval emblem of Death, he leans over history's death-bed, operates on the prone body, and liberates its soul. After this surgical parturition, under the knife of 'theoretical practice', history reappears in two forms. Form 1: an infinity (a 'bad infinity') of human events and collisions of human wills, which, however, since they are formless, *are not 'historical'*. Events turn out to be non-events. For 'what makes *such and such* an event

historical is not the fact that it is an *event*, but precisely its *insertion into forms which are themselves historical . . .*' (F.M. 126) Whatever cannot be inserted into these forms are unhappenings (historically), and very much of the inert body of history turns out to be composed of such. Form 1 can now be dismissed, and hurriedly, for the body is corrupting even before it is interred. Form 2 of history is its soul. But what can this soul be, if it is not events, unless it be those forms which guarantee that an event is truly 'historical'? A historical fact is '*a fact which causes a mutation in the existing structural relations.*' (R.C. 102) Process turns out to be, not historical process at all (this wretched soul has been incarnated in the wrong body) but the structural articulation of social and economic formations, as Smelser and others had long supposed. Form 2, the soul, must therefore quickly be re-incarnated in a more theoretically-hygienic body. The soul of process must be arrested in its flight and thrust into the marble statue of structural immobilism: and there she sits, the gracious lady whom we have already met, *La Structure à Dominante*.

This is not one of Althusser's more elegant passages of argument. At a first, 'common sense' reading it might pass. After all, if I get up from my desk (as I will do shortly), to take the darned dog for a walk, this is scarcely an 'historical' event. So that what makes events historical must be defined in some other way. But historical events remain *events* even after we have made a theoretical selection; theory does not reduce events to structures; even when we have defined out innumerable events as of negligible interest to historical analysis, what we must analyse remains as a process of eventuation. Indeed, it is exactly the significance of the event to this process which affords the criterion for selection. Nor is there any guarantee against teleology – as Althusser appears to suppose – in reducing process to stasis. It was the old error of mechanical materialism – and also of analogies from 'natural process' brought to bear upon human affairs – to suppose that a clock is a clock is a clock. But on closer inspection, ideological clock-makers have been identified, and goals have been found – not only at the

terminus of process – but planted in the automatic motions of clocks. For if a mode of production is proposed to entail a regular and rational form of sequential development, and a complex (but uniform) internal relational structuration, *independent of the rationality and agency of the human actors who in fact produce and relate*, then, very soon, the questions will be asked: whose is the divine will which programmed this automating structure, where is the ulterior ‘unconscious power’?

Perhaps Althusser was aware of the tawdry texture of this argument in *For Marx*. For in subsequent writings he has returned, with increasing obsessiveness, to these two evictions from history: the eviction of human agency, the eviction of historical time, or process. I have presented these two propositions in sequence, but in fact they arise in his theory simultaneously. We will consider first his elevated disquisition on historical time in *Reading Capital*.

This is difficult for a historian to handle with patience. It is composed, in about equal parts, of banalities, of elaborate verbalisations which offer no purchase whatsoever for actual historical analysis, and of ridiculous errors. The banalities are composed of polemics against antagonists of straw, and pompous observations directed towards historians (to ‘draw their attention to empiricist ideology which, with a few exceptions, overwhelmingly dominates every variety of history’ (R.C. 109)) as to matters which have been the object of advanced historical investigation for decades. The best that we can say of these observations is that they served the purpose of revealing Althusser’s ignorance of historiography in his own country (as, Marc Bloch’s comparative methods, Braudel’s reflections on historical time).¹⁰⁰ The kindest thing that can be said is that one or two of the problems which he gestures towards had been formulated long before in historical practice; how else could British and French historians exchange views on ‘the bourgeois revolution’, British and Indian historians bring into a common discourse ‘medieval’ societies governed by Plantaganets and Moghuls, American and Japanese historians exchange

knowledge on the differential developments of industrial revolutions, without this being so? The worst that can be said is that, once again, Althusser announces, as original and rigorous Marxist theory, notions disintegrative of the full historical process, notions highly regarded within bourgeois historiography (notably in the United States) – as in certain forms of comparative history, development theory, and modernization theory: theories supported by an elaborated armoury of positivistic methodology. As so often before, Althusser has been arrested by bourgeois concepts and taken for a bourgeois ride; he seeks, not to transform these concepts, but to convert their vocabulary.

The verbalisations and the errors we can take together.

We must grasp in all its rigour the absolute necessity of liberating the theory of history from any compromise with ‘empirical’ temporality, with the ideological concept of time which underlies and overlies it, or with the ideological idea that the theory of history, *as theory* could be subject to the ‘concrete’ determinations of ‘historical time’ ... (R.C. 105)

In what does this ‘liberation’ consist? It consists, precisely, in displacing process by structure. More strictly, structures (modes of production, social formations) do not eventuate and undergo transformations within the larger historical process. Structure, like a whale, opens its jaws, and swallows process up: thereafter, process survives unhappily in structure’s stomach. To do this trick of theoretical practice, it is necessary to redefine synchrony and diachrony. Structure cannot be disclosed by synchronic procedures (in their customary sense): for example, by freezing ‘history’ into a momentary pose, taking a ‘section’ at a moment of stasis, analysing the articulation of a ‘totality’. For (swallowed) process is inscribed within structure, and survives as the development of that structure’s forms. Not only does structure have a developmental progression (vestigial process) but it is articulated with great complexity and characterised by uneven development.

I have shown¹⁰¹ that in order to conceive this 'dominance' of a structure over the other structures in the unity of a conjuncture it is necessary to refer to the principle of the determination 'in the last instance' of the non-economic structures by the economic structure; and that this 'determination in the last instance' is an absolute precondition for the necessity and intelligibility of the displacements of structures in the hierarchy of effectivity, or of the displacement of 'dominance' between the structured levels of the whole . . . (R.C. 99)

But at any particular 'conjuncture', when we might choose to arrest history or take a 'section', the 'last instance' (which, we remember, never arrives) is not likely to be around. This kind of synchrony, which looks for a simultaneous instant of 'totality', will misread the evidence. Moreover, most of the other 'instances' or 'levels' of the structure will present themselves improperly, since they are all motoring around on different schedules:

We can argue from the specific structure of the Marxist whole that it is no longer possible to think the process of the development of the different levels of the whole *in the same historical time*. Each of these different levels does not have the same type of historical existence. On the contrary, we have to assign to each level a *peculiar time*, relatively autonomous and hence relatively independent, even in its dependence, of the "times" of the other levels. We can and must say: for each mode of production there is a peculiar time and history, punctuated in a specific way by the development of the productive forces; the relations of production have their peculiar time and history, punctuated in a specific way; the political superstructure has its own history . . . ; philosophy has its own time and history . . . ; aesthetic productions . . . scientific formations . . . etc. Each of these peculiar histories is punctuated with peculiar rhythms and can only be known on condition that we have defined the *concept* of the specificity of its historical temporarily and its punctuations (continuous development, revolutions, breaks, etc.) The fact that each of these times and each of these histories is *relatively autonomous* does not make them so many domains which are *independent* of the whole: the specificity of each of these times and each of these histories – in other words, their relative autonomy and independence – is based on a certain type of articulation in the whole, and therefore on a certain type of *dependence* with respect to the whole . . . (R.C. 99–100)

And so we drone on, as we may well do, for the possible permutations of 'structure', 'levels', 'instances', 'last instances', 'relative autonomy', 'specificity', 'peculiar', and 'articulation' are inexhaustible: 'the mode and degree of *independence* of each time and history is therefore necessarily determined by the mode and degree of *dependence* of each level within the set of articulations of the whole.'

The point is, that the customary ('ideological') notion of synchrony is likely to overlook all this. Nor can we even take a ragged, temporarily-slantwise 'section' of the structure, since while this might give us an indication of the hierarchy of 'levels' (and in fact Althusser is always giving us vaporous verbal 'sections' of this kind), it will not show us the operative principles of dominance and development. We must be enabled to 'think, in its peculiar articulation, the *function* of such an element or such a level in the current configuration of the whole.' The task is:

To determine the relation of articulation of this element as a function of other elements, of this structure as a function of other structures, it obliges us to define what has been called its *overdetermination* or *under-determination* as a function of the structure of the determination of the whole, it obliges us to define what might be called, in another language, the *index of determination*, the *index of effectivity* currently attributable to the element or structure in question in the general structure of the whole. By *index of effectivity* we may understand the character of more or less dominant or subordinate and therefore more or less 'paradoxical' determination of a given element or structure in the current mechanism of the whole. And this is nothing but the theory of the conjuncture indispensable to the theory of history.

I do not want to go any further with this analysis, although it has still hardly been elaborated at all. (R.C. 106–7)

This is wise, because the 'theory of the conjuncture', which is 'indispensable' but which is nowhere elaborated, would not appear to be a 'theory' at all, but an exalted way of saying 'Now'. But 'now' (Whether today's 'now' or some moment of 'now' in the past) may also be seen as synchronic knowledge:

The synchronic is then nothing but *the conception* of the specific relations that exist between the different elements and the different structures of the structure of the whole, it is the *knowledge* of the relations of dependence and articulation which makes it an organic whole, a system. *The synchronic is eternity in Spinoza's sense*, or the adequate knowledge of a complex object by the adequate knowledge of its complexity. This is exactly what Marx is distinguishing from the concrete-real historical sequence in the words: 'How, indeed, could the single logical formula of movement, of sequence, of time, explain the body of society, in which all economic relations co-exist simultaneously and support one another?' (*Poverty of Philosophy*). (R.C. 107)

The synchronic, then, is this new usage, is a concept of immense dignity: it is nothing less than the theory of Spinozan eternity, the knowledge of the exceedingly complex character of *La Structure à Dominante*. But there is still a small place left for the diachronic, which (we remember) was swallowed by structure some time ago, but still has an impoverished existence within structure's stomach. 'Historical time' is an 'ideological' concept derived by 'empiricism' from the supposed 'obviousness' of the 'concrete-real historical sequence.' Under theoretical scrutiny, diachrony reveals itself to be 'merely the false name for the *process*, or for what Marx called the *development of forms*.' (R.C. 108) But this 'process' is no longer the whole process of historical eventuation, within which structures and social formations arise and are transformed. This 'process' is now an *attribute* of structure, or, more exactly, it is the history of structure's possible permutations, combinations, and forms. This concept of historical time

Can only be based on the complex and differentially articulated structure in dominance of the social totality that constitutes the social formation arising from a determinate mode of production, it can only be assigned a content as a function of the structure of that totality, considered either as a whole, or in its different 'levels.' In particular, it is only possible to give a content to the concept of historical time by defining historical time as the specific form of existence of the social totality under consideration, an existence in which different structural levels of temporarily interfere, because of the peculiar relations of correspondence, non-correspondence, articulation, dislocation and torsion which obtain, between the different 'levels' of the whole in

accordance with its general structure. (R.C. 108)

Thus the eviction of process from history, and its subsequent incorporation as a secondary attribute of structure. In all this exposition, I have more than allowed to Althusser his 'say'; and I think that I have even improved upon his argument by marking sequential propositions more firmly and by compressing some of his repetitious rhetorical invocations. We will now offer some observations. And, first, it can be seen that this is very much more than a 'flirtation' with the vocabulary of structuralism. This is an inexorable structuralism, even though it is, in this or that respect, a different one from those derived from Saussure, Lévi-Strauss or Lacan. It shares fully in that ideological predisposition of that moment ('conjuncture?') of the Cold War stasis, which Sartre has identified: a 'dominant tendency' toward 'the denial of history.' In this moment, structuralism 'gives the people what they needed':

An eclectic synthesis in which Robbe-Grillet, structuralism, linguistics, Lacan, and *Tel Quel* are systematically utilized to demonstrate the impossibility of historical reflection. Behind history, of course, it is Marxism which is attacked.¹⁰²

Second, we should note the apparent 'reputability' of the rhetorical acrobatics. If we suppose (as Althusser always does appear to suppose) that the only possible alternative to his version of 'Marxism' is the most crude caricature of vulgar 'economism', then any aspirant intellectual subjected to the cynical scrutiny of 'bourgeois' scholars will clearly opt for Althusser. If we must say *either* (with Stalin) that 'the base creates the superstructure precisely in order that it may serve it', or (with Althusser) that 'between the different "levels" of the whole' there are 'peculiar relations of correspondence, non-correspondence, articulation, dislocation and torsion', then, if we are in a seminar at the Sorbonne, we will find the latter vocabulary more reputable. We may also find that the assignment of different times and histories to different

('relatively autonomous') 'levels' (political, aesthetic, scientific, philosophic, etc.) affords to us a 'Marxist' legitimisation for carrying on with age-old academic procedures of isolation which are abjectly disintegrative of the enterprise of historical materialism: the understanding of the full historical process. Thus Althusser can only pose as a 'flexible' theorist by suppressing any recognition of the actual practice, theory, and findings of historians in the Marxist tradition: and in other traditions as well.

Third, we may note, once again, the characteristically idealist mode of discourse. Althusser supposes that we can attain to a theory of structure, of history, by re-arranging and elaborating our vocabulary. Now, clearly, any statement, however 'abstract', however 'empirical', is constituted of an arrangement of words. And certain crucially-significant conceptual discoveries may at first be formulated in a highly abstract manner. One ought to welcome the informed scrutiny by philosophers of the lax employment by historians of unexamined concepts. But it is difficult to understand how a theory of history can be elaborated which does not, at any point, submit itself to the historical discipline, to historians' own discourse of the proof. And this, as I have sufficiently argued, involves the (empirical) interrogation of evidence; the dialogue of hypothesis and 'fact.'

Well, then, it might be argued that Althusser, in his generosity, has presented to historians, not one concept, but several volumes of concepts and hypotheses, which should now be tested in historical laboratories. But this will never be possible, unless in such factories as that of Messrs Hindess and Hirst, who have discovered the secret of manufacturing synthetic history and synthetic sociology out of conceptual air. For Althusser's categories have already been de-socialised and de-historicised before we can start. They commence their life as *categories of stasis*: that is, however elaborate the orbits in which they rotate, the permutations between orbits and the distortions as they are presented to the differential fields of gravity of other orbiting categories and the great attractive power of *La Dominante* – however much fussy complexity of motion is

simulated by the vocabulary, the categories remain distinct, isolated from each other, the same.

Moreover, we are offered an arbitrary selection of categories – as 'economics', 'politics', 'ideology' – and neither the principle of selection nor the categories themselves are examined. In the crucially-important passages which we set out at length above, we hear nothing about the State and almost nothing about classes. Other categories are absent throughout: we hear nothing about *power* – perhaps this is 'politics', although in 'real history' it may often also be 'economics' or 'law' or 'religion'. We hear nothing about *consciousness* (whether as *mentalité* or as culture or *habitus* or as class consciousness) and nothing about values or value-systems (unless in their dismissal along with 'moralism' and 'ideology'). Thus we are given an arbitrary (theoretically unjustified) selection of categories, and these are static, unexamined ones, which supposedly maintain their analytic effectivity not only through all the development of forms of a given mode of production but also in differing modes of production (for feudalism also has 'politics', 'economics', 'religion', etc.) But over historical time the real content of these categories has changed so profoundly as to impose upon the historian extreme care in their employment, just as, over the same period, 'science' has changed from magic to alchemy to science to technology – and sometimes to ideology.

The reason why Althusser is able to employ static categories in this way is that they are empty of all social and historical content: all that has been tipped away, and his rotating 'instances' are like so many hollow tin cans. If we scarcely hear about the State or about class, we can not expect to hear about particular state formations or about *which* classes or about alternative and conflicting beliefs within 'ideology'. The talismanic concepts are 'relative autonomy' and 'in the last instance determination.' We were given these by Engels, and we learned them in our theoretical cradle. Althusser now polishes them, gives them back to us, and supposes that they illuminate the whole historical landscape. But *determination*, which is at the still centre of his whole revolving gravitational field, does not merit

one sentence of theoretical scrutiny.¹⁰³ 'In the last instance' is not examined: it is merely perpetually postponed. 'Relative autonomy', on the contrary, has been lovingly elaborated, over many pages, and reappears as 'instances', 'levels', differential temporalities, dislocations and torsions. Yes, yes, and perhaps all this is so. But how might we put such a concept to work? Is law, for example, relatively autonomous, and, if so, autonomous of what, and how relatively?

I have, as it happens, been interested in this myself, in my historical practice: not, of course, in any grand way – for the whole of history, nor for the capitalist mode of production everywhere, but in a very petty conjuncture: in an island on the edge of the Atlantic, very well supplied with lawyers, at a moment in the eighteenth century. So my evidence is highly marginal, as well as being seriously contaminated by empirical content. But what I discovered there would make *La Structure à Dominante* boggle. For I found that law did not keep politely to a 'level' but was at *every* bloody level; it was imbricated within the mode of production and productive relations themselves (as property-rights, definitions of agrarian practice) and it was simultaneously present in the philosophy of Locke; it intruded brusquely within alien categories, reappearing bewigged and gowned in the guise of ideology; it danced a cotillon with religion, moralising over the theatre of Tyburn; it was an arm of politics and politics was one of its arms; it was an academic discipline, subjected to the rigour of its own autonomous logic; it contributed to the definition of the self-identity both of rulers and of ruled; above all, it afforded an arena for class struggle, within which alternative notions of law were fought out.

But how about 'in the last instance determination'? Did I observe that? Well, for most of the time when I was watching, law was running quite free of economy, doing its errands, defending its property, preparing the way for it, and so on . . . But . . . I hesitate to whisper the heresy . . . on several occasions, while I was actually watching, the lonely hour of the last instance *actually came*. The last instance like an unholy ghost, actually, grabbed hold of law, throttled it, and forced it to change its

language and to will into existence forms appropriate to the mode of production, such as enclosure acts and new case-law excluding customary common rights. But was law 'relatively autonomous'? Oh, *yes*. Sometimes. Relatively. *Of course*.¹⁰⁴

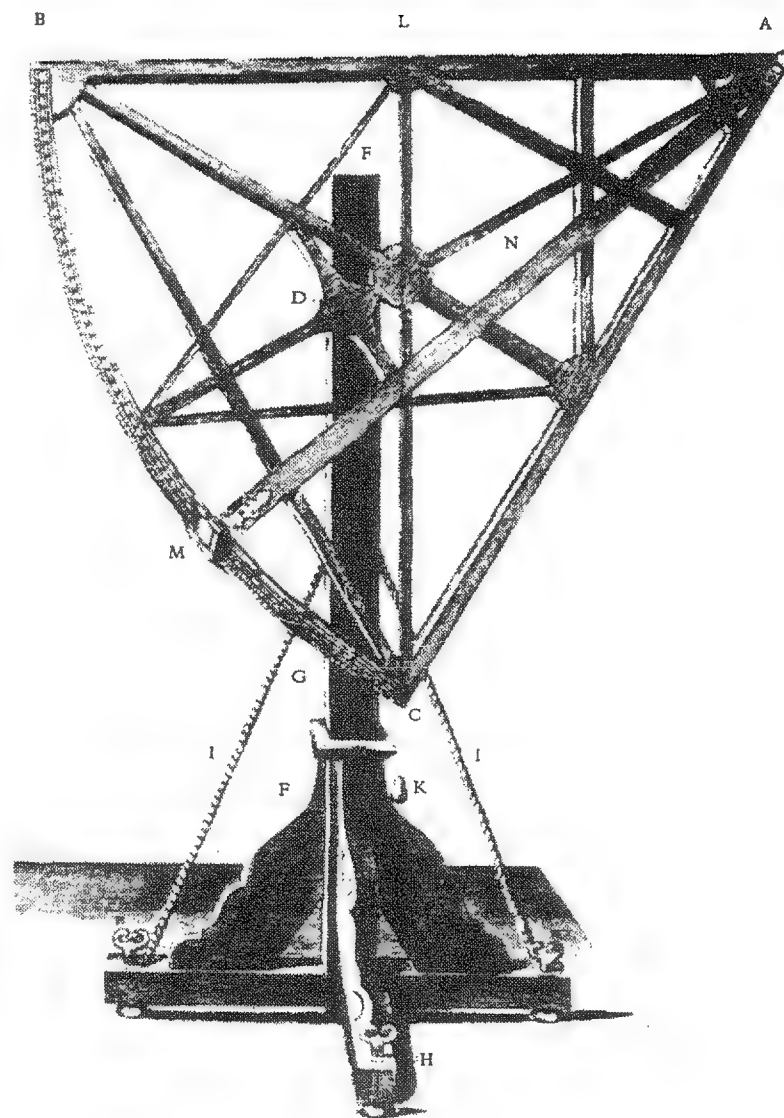
Please do not misunderstand me. I am not only arguing that Althusser has taken his categories unexamined from his own academic surroundings: the departments of politics, law, economics, etc. – academic isolates which any historian in his apprenticeship learns to disregard. Nor am I only arguing that Althusser's elaborate constructions advance enquiry not one jot: that we commence with 'relative autonomy' and, after tedious exercises in sophistication (but without putting the concept to any real work or feeding it with any content), we come out at the end with, exactly, 'relative autonomy' – a kind of oratorical sauce with which to season our researches, but for which (since my palate has always approved it) we have to thank not Althusser but Engels. Nor am I only arguing that Althusser's concepts and constructions are futile because they are merely arrangements of words, so lacking in substantive content that they afford no purchase to a historian as analytic tools. All these things are true. But I am also arguing that Althusser's constructions are actively *wrong* and thoroughly misleading. His notion of 'levels' motoring around in history at different speeds and on different schedules is an academic fiction. For all these 'instances' and 'levels' are in fact human activities, institutions, and ideas. We are talking about men and women, in their material life, in their determinate relationships, in their experience of these, and in their self-consciousness of this experience. By 'determinate relationships' we indicate relationships structured within particular social formations in class ways – a very different set of 'levels', and one generally overlooked by Althusser – and that the class experience will find simultaneous expression in all these 'instances', 'levels', institutions and activities.

It is true that the effectivity of class experience and conflict will be differently expressed in different activities and institutions, and that we may, by an act of analytic isolation, write

distinct 'histories' of these. But at least some part of what is expressed – as, fear of the crowd in 'politics' reappearing as contempt for manual labour among the genteel reappearing as contempt for *praxis* in the academy reappearing as Black Acts in the 'law' reappearing as doctrines of subordination in 'religion' – will be *the same unitary experience* or determining pressure, eventuating in the *same* historical time, and moving to the *same* rhythm: a peasant revolt or the Gordon Riots may accentuate the pressure, a *longue durée* of good harvests and demographic equilibrium may allow it to relax. So that all these distinct 'histories' must be convened within the same real historical time, the time within which process eventuates. This integral process is the ultimate object of historical knowledge, and it is this which Althusser offers to disintegrate.

Certainly, 'relative autonomy' is a helpful talisman against reductionism – against collapsing art or law or religion abjectly back into class or 'economics'; but, without substantial addition, and substantive analysis, it remains as nothing more than a warning-notice. Certainly, the hour of the last instance never comes, if, by that hour, one supposes the total collapse of all human activities back into the elementary terms of a mode of production. Such collapses may be detonated on paper (they often are) but they cannot be observed in history. But, in another sense, the 'last instance' has *always arrived*, and is ever-present as a pressure within all of Althusser's 'instances'; nor is the last instance ever lonely, for it is attended by all the retinue of class.

That was a long observation. Althusser's mode of discourse is idealist: he employs static categories derived from the disciplines of the academy: *La Structure à Dominante* is too well-bred to acknowledge class in her character: and his constructions are disintegrative of process. The fourth observation may be brief. Althusser's constructions of the 'theory of history' afford no terms for *experience*, nor for process when it is considered as human *practice*. We have already discussed, long ago, Althusser's epistemological refusals of experience ('empiricism'). That was odd, but a pardonable oddity in a



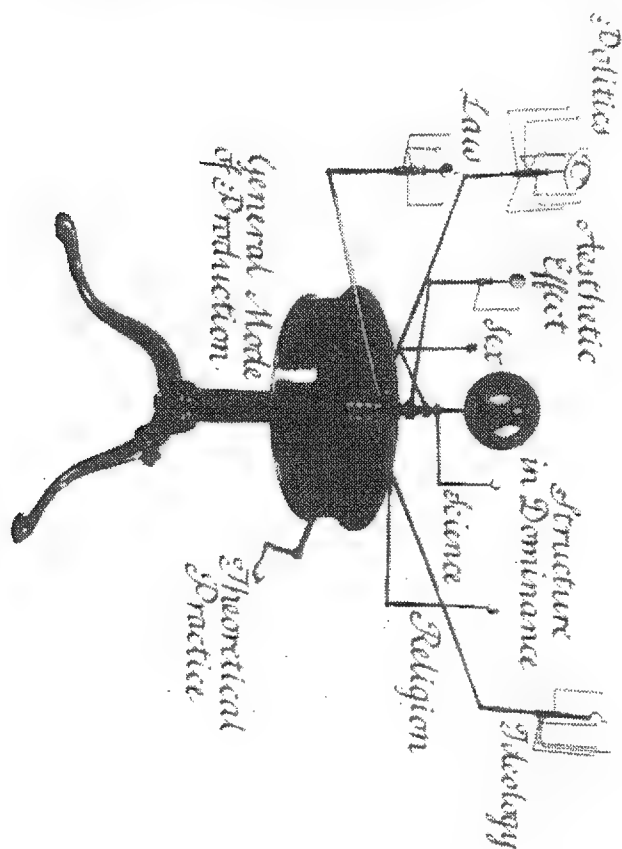
Vulgar Marxism, or Economism

H = Basis

A – B – C = Superstructure

The machine is operated by the pulley (K) of class struggle. Note: this model represents the primitive state of Marxism before Althusser.

BASIS SUPERSTRUCTURE

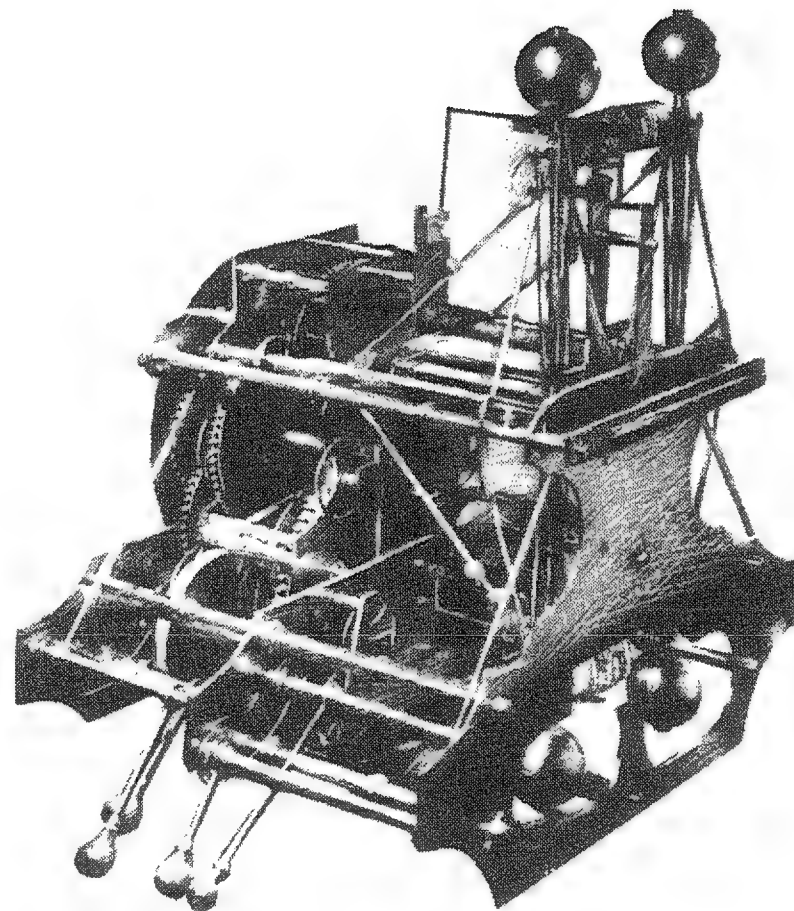


Althusser's Marxist Orrery

Note: While this machine may be simply rotated by turning the handle of theoretical practice, it is possible to replace the handle with a motor: see next plate.

PLATE II

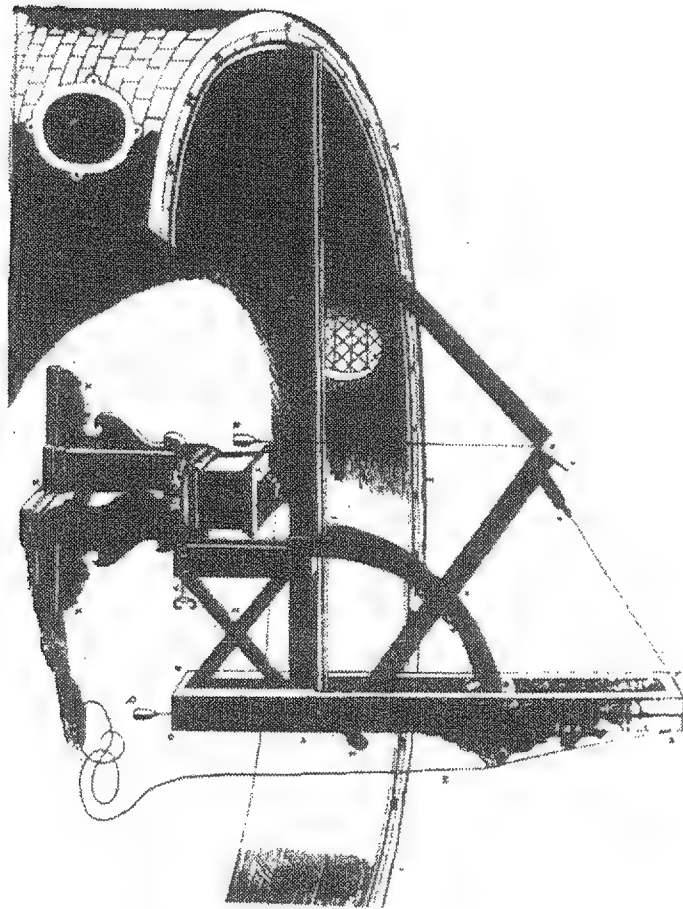
Plates II and III are reproduced by permission of the Trustees of the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich.



The Motor of History: Class Struggle

The motor, which may be attached to the orrery is operated by four simple levers at the base: these activate respectively the four gears of bourgeoisie, petty bourgeoisie, proletariat, and peasantry. When left to run automatically, the motions are governed by four globes (two above, two at base) of the true and false consciousness of bourgeoisie and proletariat. In both cases the true and false globes are held in tension by a spring (ideology), and the resultant torsion regulates the motor.

PLATE III



Mode of Production/Social Formation

X = the basis of productive forces. Upon this rest the productive relations (W & T), regulated by the screw (V) of surplus value extraction. The long horizontal arm is the economy, or, more strictly, capital, positing the conditions for its reproduction. This arm inscribes the shape and limits of the social formation (the wall, Y). The high vertical arm is the State, from which are deployed two pulleys: the Repressive State Apparatus (R), and the Ideological State Apparatus (Q). Note: a very much refined model of this, without any necessary correspondence between horizontal arm and wall, has now been patented by Messrs Hindess and Hirst.

PLATE IV

philosopher, who can cite formidable precedents. But it is not pardonable in anyone who offers to think about history, since experience and practice are manifest; nor is it pardonable in a 'Marxist', since experience is a necessary middle term between social being and social consciousness: it is experience (often class experience) which gives a coloration to culture, to values, and to thought: it is by means of experience that the mode of production exerts a determining pressure upon other activities: and it is by practice that production is sustained. The reason for these omissions will become clear when we consider the other eviction, the eviction of human agency.

My fifth observation has been argued sufficiently in passing. Althusser's structuralism is, like all structuralisms, a system of *closure* (see p. 113). It fails to effect the distinction between structured process, which, while subject to determinate pressures, remains open-ended and only partially-determined, and a structured whole, within which process is encapsulated. It opts for the latter, and goes on to construct something much more splendid than a clock. We may call it Althusser's orrery, a complex mechanism in which all the bodies in the solar system revolve around the dominant sun. But it remains a mechanism, in which, as in all such structuralisms, human practice is reified, and 'man is in some way developed by the development of structure.'¹⁰⁵ So inexorable is this mechanism, in the relation of parts to the whole within any mode of production, that it is only by means of the most acrobatic formulations that we can envisage the possibility of transition from one mode of production to another.¹⁰⁶

In all the passages of argument cited above, there is only one argument which I find to be good. This is in Althusser's critique of the synchronic methods of other structuralisms (or sociological theories), which by arresting process and taking a 'section' suppose that the articulation of a totality will be revealed (p. 124). But the critique is inadequate, and for good reasons, for an adequate critique would have exploded in Althusser's own face. It is not only that the structuration of process, (or, as I would prefer, the congruent logics of process)

can only be revealed in the observation of process over time. It is also that each moment, each 'now' ('conjuncture'), should not be seen as a frozen moment of the intersection of multiple subordinate and dominant determinations ('overdetermination') but as a moment of *becoming*, of alternative possibilities, of ascendant and descendant forces, of opposing (class) definitions and exertions, of 'double-tongued' signs. Between these two notions of the 'now' there lies an unbridgeable gulf, which falls between Necessity (or Vico's divine will) and Morris's ever-baffled but ever-resurgent human agents. On the one hand, history as a process without a subject: on the other, history as unmastered human practice. We know which side Althusser is on: process programmed within a structure, an orrery turned by a hidden hand.

xii

And yet – we had almost forgotten – a motive-power is provided. For – 'class struggle is the motor of history.' We first meet with this 'basic Marxist proposition' in *For Marx* (p. 215). We have found the hidden hand. We hear about this less in *Reading Capital*: the class struggle scarcely appears in any of its critical formulations on history, and this may account for my forgetfulness. But it reappears, and with the sternest political countenance, in the wiggling which Althusser gave to the good Dr. Lewis. It is now a thesis of Marxism-Leninism: "The class struggle is the motor of history" (Thesis of the *Communist Manifesto*, 1847). (Essays, 47).

Now there are certain points to make about this 'basic Marxist proposition', unexceptionable as it may be. First (and a trivial point) I can find the proposition nowhere in Marx, nor can my more learned friends. It is certainly not to be found in the *Communist Manifesto*, although the reader might suppose – I did suppose – that we were being offered a direct quotation. What the *Manifesto* does say, in its opening line, as should be too well-known to repeat, is: 'The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles,' to which Engels subse-

quently added a footnote excusing from the formulation primitive societies (which, we must presume, had no 'motor'). The two statements, in any case, are not the same. But I do find, on occasion, in Marx and Engels analogies which bring us very close to 'motor.' For example, in a letter of 1879 to the German Party leaders (Bebel, etc.) over the signatures of both, they write:

For almost forty years we have stressed the class-struggle as the immediate driving power of history, and in particular the class-struggle between bourgeoisie and proletariat as the great lever of the modern social revolution . . . ¹⁰⁷

So: the point turns out to be a quibble: Althusser may keep his 'motor', and we may offer him a 'lever' as well.

There was another point, which I cannot now remember . . . Oh, yes, 'motor' is not a 'basic proposition' or a concept or a 'thesis' at all: it is an *analogy*. This point is a little more difficult. If Marx *had* said (and I think he did not) that 'the class struggle is the motor of history' he would not have meant that the class struggle had somehow transmogrified itself into a Boulton & Watt steam-engine driving history's moving-parts. The statement is of the order of 'as if': we may envisage the history of society *as if* it were driven forward by the power (engine, motor) of the class struggle. Analogies may be good or bad, but my present point is that they serve the purpose of explication or illustration – they are a condiment to argument often used only once or twice in passing, but they are not the argument itself. They may sometimes be greatly illuminating, and in ways unintended by the author; they merit a 'symptomatic' reading; in certain authors (for example, Burke) they may be more illuminating than the argument itself; they are often the sign of thought's vitality. But, and still, analogies, metaphors, images are not the same thing as concepts. They cannot be transfixed with the arrow of theory, plucked from the side of the text which they explicate, and mounted as concepts, on a plinth inscribed 'Basic Proposition.' It may not matter much in this case. But it.

does matter, very much, in the case of another analogy, which has more generally been petrified into a concept: that of basis and superstructure. The graveyard of philosophy is cluttered with grand systems which mistook analogies for concepts. A headstone is already being prepared for Marxist structuralism.

Point three: is it a good analogy? Not particularly. The reader who has bothered to accompany me this far can certainly think this out for himself.

I have argued before (p. 114) that there are definite reasons why analogies derived from mechanism or from natural process can *never* be adequate to human process, which includes properties not to be found in either. Given that the attempt must sometimes be made, for purposes of explication, the analogy of 'driving-power' is inoffensive. 'Driving-power' is not, of course, the same thing as the engine or 'motor' itself, which initiates the drive. Marx and Engels, who lived in the pre-history of the internal combustion engine, were perhaps thinking of a Lancashire cotton mill, and not of the engine and its furnace, but of the shafts and transmission belts which directed the same *drive* to different machines and moving parts: this drive, transmitted equally to law and politics and ideology, becomes, by analogy, the class struggle, and all the parts in motion together (the factory) become 'history.'

The analogy may be helpful in some ways,¹⁰⁸ and unhelpful in others. But what concerns us is the use to which it is put by Althusser. For we remember that for Althusser 'history', in its common usage as eventuating human process, is an 'ideological' concept, to be rejected along with 'historical time.' But Althusser also must recognise that Marx himself was not innocent of this 'ideological' error. (Indeed, how could he not recognise this, when Marx and Engels's works are full of allusions and invocations to history as process?). Marx offers us a structuralism (a premonition of Althusserianism) but he was insufficiently aware (theoretically) of what he was offering, and of the difference between this and a 'historicism.' He 'did not think the *concept* of this distinction with all the sharpness that could be desired; he did not think theoretically . . . either the

concept or the theoretical implications of the theoretically revolutionary step he had taken.' (R.C. 120-1) Following Vico, Marx blundered into 'a remarkable presupposition: that the actors of history are the authors of its text, the subjects of its production.' (R.C. 139) (One might note, in passing, that this is not one presupposition but two different analogies: actors certainly are not usually authors of their text, but they are subjects of a theatrical production, although in ways partially determined by the producer.) In Marx's discourse there are 'lacunae, blanks and failures of rigour', and these occur when we encounter the word 'history' – an 'apparently full word' but 'in fact theoretically an empty word', replete with ideology. However, in Althusser's 'epistemological and critical reading . . . we cannot but hear behind the proffered word the silence it conceals, see the blank of suspended rigour, scarcely the time of a lightning-flash in the darkness of the text.' It is the business of theoretical practice, like a skilled restorer of old manuscripts, to mend these tears, repair these blanks and silences, and restore the text. (R.C. 143)

It must follow that if both Marx and Althusser say that class struggle is the 'motor' of history (which Marx does not) they are saying different things: for Marx is thinking absent-mindedly of an (ideological?) process of struggle and eventuation, and Althusser has rigorously thought a structural orrery:

History is an immense *natural-human* system in movement, and the motor of history is class struggle. History is a process, and a *process without a subject*. (Essays, 51)

For Marx the historical process eventuates *as if* it was impelled forward by this generalised drive (of conflicting actors); for Althusser the orrery of system *literally is motored* through all its evolutions and permutations by class struggle.

We are not for a moment allowed to suppose that classes are the *subjects* of history, which might then be seen as the outcome of refracted human agency. Althusser does, in a concession to a supposedly simple-minded English public, once offer the

'thesis': 'It is the *masses* which make history.' (*Essays*, 46) (No-one, it seems, had warned him, in this empirical island, the category of 'masses' had long been scrutinised, and found to be a disreputable – indeed, a 'bourgeois' concept.)¹⁰⁹ But the concession is no sooner made than it is withdrawn: for the masses are *made* to make history, they are motored by the class struggle, and the classes also (it turns out) are motored. Class is a category which, in Althusser's major work, goes unexamined. And the classes which do make an entrance from time to time, and march up and down the pages – the bourgeoisie, the proletariat – are exceedingly crude projections of Theory, like primeval urges with iron heads, since 'politics', 'law', etc., etc., have been taken out of their heads and put at different 'levels', and since consciousness, values, and culture have been excluded from the vocabulary. So that, while we are told that class struggle is the 'motor' of history, there is a theoretical cut-off beyond which we may not go: we are not informed as to the nature of classes, nor how struggle eventuates, nor how this 'motor' works. Althusser's contribution to *Reading Capital* concludes: 'The reader will know how Volume Three ends. A title: *Classes*. Forty lines, then silence.' (R.C. 193) Then silence.

After Althusser, his epigones: Balibar, Hindess and Hirst, Poulantzas, and a hundred others have been happily filling in that silence, taking advantage of the blank pages in Marx's unfinished notebook. I do not like what they write. For historical materialism has also made, over many decades, its own very substantial investigations into class struggle, and has developed its findings in theoretical ways. There are disagreements among practitioners, of course; but in this area, and within the British tradition of Marxist historiography, there is very substantial agreement. And our findings can not, with any exercise of verbal agility, be compressed into the forms of Althusser's orrery.

I have written about this so often that I bore, not only my audience, but myself. I will not go over it all again. Class formations (I have argued) arise at the intersection of determination and self-activity: the working class 'made itself as much as it was

made.' We cannot put 'class' here and 'class consciousness' there, as two separate entities, the one sequential upon the other, since both must be taken together – the experience of determination, and the 'handling' of this in conscious ways. Nor can we deduce class from a static 'section' (since it is a *becoming* over time), nor as a function of a mode of production, since class formations and class consciousness (while subject to determinate pressures) eventuate in an open-ended process of *relationship* – of struggle with other classes – over time.

As it happens, Althusser and I appear to share one common proposition: class struggle is the prior concept to class, class does not precede but arises out of struggle.¹¹⁰ But the coincidence is only an apparition. For in one view (a view shared by most Marxist historians) classes arise because men and women, in determinate productive relations, identify their antagonistic interests, and come to struggle, to think, and to value in class ways: thus the process of class formation is a process of self-making, although under conditions which are 'given.' But this view is intolerable to Althusser, since it would give back to process a subject, for the process would then be seen to be one in which men and women (however baffled, and however limited their space for agency) remain agents. Althusser however, while silent on class, has never taken one step along this dangerous 'humanist' road. For, prior to the concept of the class struggle is the concept of 'contradiction', and the second concept is a function of the first:

The specific difference of Marxist contradiction is its 'unevenness', or 'over-determination', which reflects in it its condition of existence, that is, the specific structure of unevenness (in dominance) of the ever-pre-given complex whole which is its existence. Thus understood, contradiction is the motor of all development. (F.M. 217)

The whole of this monstrous 'theoretical expression' (and several lines more) are italicised to emphasise their centrality and their rigour, but I have spared the reader's eyes. I cannot so easily spare his thoughts. For we now find that contradiction is

the motor which motors the motor of class struggle. Tracing these motors back in series, Balibar concludes, with estimable logic:

Classes are *functions of the process of production as a whole*. They are not its subjects, on the contrary, they are determined by its form. (R.C. 267)

The subject (or agent) of history disappears once again. Process, for the *n*th time, is re-ified. And since classes are 'functions of the process of production' (a process into which, it seems, no human agency could possibly enter), the way is thrown open once again to all the rubbish of deducing classes, class fractions, class ideologies ('true' and 'false') from their imaginary positioning – above, below, interpellatory, vestigial, slant-wise – within a mode of production (or within its multiple contradictions, torsions, dislocations, etc. etc.), and this mode of production is conceived of as *something other than* its eventuation in historical process, and within 'the ensemble of social relations', although in fact it exists only as a construction within a metaphysical oration.

We might define the present situation more precisely if we employed a category found frequently in Marx's correspondence with Engels, but a category which evaded Althusser's vigilant symptomatic scrutiny. All this 'shit' (*Geschichtenscheissenschlopf*), in which both bourgeois sociology and Marxist structuralism stand up to their chins (Dahrendorf beside Poulantzas, modernization theory beside theoretical practice) has been shat upon as by conceptual paralysis, by the de-historicising of process, and by reducing class, ideology, social formations, and almost everything else, to categorical stasis. The sociological section: the elaborate differential rotations within the closure of the orrery; the self-extrapolating programmed developmental series; the mildly disequibrated equilibrium models, in which dissensus strays unhappily down strange corridors, searching for a reconciliation with consensus; the systems-analyses and structuralisms, with their torques and

their combinatories; the counter-factual fictions; the econometric and cleometric groovers – all of these theories hobble along programmed routes from one static category to the next. And all of them are *Geschichtenscheissenschlopf*, unhistorical shit.

And yet, in these days, we are offered little else. They torture us on the rack of their interminable formulations until we are brought to the limits of endurance. We may not answer in any other language; only this one is rigorous and reputable. Above our heads, in the high academies, the inquisitors dispute; they fiercely disagree, but they recognise each other's complexity and repute. At last they extract from us a denial: a denial of human agency, creativity, a denial even of self. But, as we rise from their theoretical racks, we see, through the window, the process of history going on. '*E per*' *si muove!*' – and yet, *it does move!* We know – for in some remote part of our personality we remain determined by reason – that we must, somehow, find the courage to repudiate our own denial.

As our senses return, we remember why we never did much like the analogy of class struggle as the motor of history. For it supposes two distinct entities: 'history', which is inert, an intricate composite of parts; and a 'motor' (class struggle) which is brought *to* it, and which drives these parts, or sets them in motion. Medieval scholastics would have used a different analogy: class struggle would have been the vital breath or soul that animated history's inert body. But class struggle *is* the process (or some part of it) and struggling classes *are* the body (or some part of it). Seen from this aspect, history is its own motor.

This leads us to a general reflection upon the language of structuralism. Once again, we can observe the pressure of social being upon social consciousness, not only within 'bourgeois' ideology but within Marxist thought as well. I have sketched already the political and sociological context: the glaciation of all social process induced by the Cold War. But there have been other, intersecting, reasons. European thinkers, in the nineteenth century, were disposed to grasp at analogies from natural process (often progress), not only for manifest political

and sociological reasons, but because this language seemed to be given by the technology and the natural sciences of their time. Today's theorists are very differently situated. In the first place, they are segregated more than ever before from practice; they work within institutions, which are complexly-structured, according to 'schedules' and programmes; less of their information arises from observation (unless in forays 'into the fields') and more arrives before them as Althusser's G II or G III; their knowledge of the world is composed, increasingly, within their heads or their theories by non-observational means. They are surrounded on every side by 'structures.' Even their universities (and especially the new ones) are not architectural utterances but structures, with a subterranean basis, visited only by proletarian porters and boiler-men, with economics and the social sciences on the first two floors, and philosophy and literature, which can only be reached by elevator, at much higher levels. Meanwhile technology (or what they know of technology by report) is no longer a matter of driving-shafts and belts and extending railway communications, but a matter of circuits, intricate gearing, automated programmes; the natural sciences report on complex molecular structures and the torque of DNA; institutions are subjected to systems-analysis; and within all this there arrives, with inevitable punctuality, cybernetics and the computer, which sieves, sorts, and organises impartially all languages – of technology, natural science, sociology, economics, history – on one condition only: that the categories which it ingests shall be unambiguous and constant in conformity with the constancy of its own complex binary programme.¹¹¹

I do not set all this down in order to reject it in a fit of romantic temper. This is where we live now; and this gives us some of our experience. But this experience must inevitably press into our vocabulary, and, in particular, into the vocabulary of analogy. And sometimes we must plainly resist this pressure, when we have reason to suspect that its 'common sense' disguises ideology. Just as Marx had to repudiate the 'shit' of Political Economy's Malthusian and market analogies, so we

must repudiate inappropriate analogies of levels, circuits, and complex closures. Nor can we allow the computer to dictate that our categories stand still for its convenience. The organic analogies of the nineteenth century, derived from the observation of plants, of stock, of growth, were sometimes improperly applied to human occasions, but they were, at least, analogies derived not from structure but from process. But as the observational field of today's theorists becomes more specialised and more segregated from practice, where are they to turn for comparable analogies, for a vocabulary of interaction and eventuation? We might start, I suggest, by observing ourselves.

I have hurled sufficient invective at the head of categorical stasis. And what is the alternative? An intuitive, empirical refusal of theory? A historical relativism which demands fresh categories for every context? We may be helped at this point by Sartre, whose thought I cannot (as a good Englishman) always follow in its subtlety – nor always assent to – but whose understanding of history, and whose relationship to political reality, is altogether superior, at every point, to that of Althusser.

Althusser, like Foucault, sticks to the analysis of structure. From the epistemological point of view, that amounts to returning to siding with the *concept* against the *notion*. The concept is atemporal. One can study how concepts are engendered one after the other within determined categories. But neither time itself nor, consequently, history, can be made the object of a concept. There is a contradiction in terms. When you introduce temporality, you come to see that within a temporal development the concept modifies itself. *Notion*, on the contrary, can be defined as the synthetic effort to produce an idea which develops itself by contradiction and its successive overcoming, and therefore is homogenous to the development of things.¹¹²

I am not sure that I accept this notion. But Sartre's argument conforms closely to my own earlier argument as to the approximate and provisional nature of historical concepts, as to their 'elasticity' and generality ('classes', 'class struggle'), as to their character as expectations rather than as rules. (See p. 62) It conforms also to vigilant rejection of the closed and static

concept or analogy in favour of the open and the shaping, formative one: as, by replacing 'law of motion' by 'logic of process', and by understanding determinism, not as pre-determined programming or the implantation of necessity, but in its senses as the 'setting of limits' and the 'exerting of pressures.'¹¹³ It means retaining the notion of structure, but as structural actuation (limits and pressures) within a social formation which remains protean in its forms. It means the refusal of that trick of thought, discussed by Raymond Williams in considering 'basis' and 'superstructure', by which the 'metaphorical terms for a relationship' are extended 'into abstract categories or concrete areas', until these analytic categories

As so often in idealist thought, have, almost unnoticed, become substantive descriptions, which then take habitual priority over the whole social process to which, as analytic categories, they are attempting to speak.¹¹⁴

It means that even when we decide, for legitimate reasons, to isolate certain activities for distinct analysis – as we may do with modes of production or economic process – we do not allow ourselves to be deluded by our own procedures into supposing these systems to be distinct. It means that in such procedures we employ especial care whenever we come to those 'junction-terms', which lie at the point of junction between analytic disciplines (as, 'need' in economics which may be seen as a 'norm' in anthropology) or between structure and process (as, 'class' and 'mode of production', which lie forever on those borders).

This is not all. We need, also, more historical *thought*; a greater theoretical self-consciousness as to our own concepts and procedures; and more effort, by historians, to communicate their findings to others in theoretically-cogent forms. (In all the chatter of 'theoretical practice' about modes of production, pre-capitalist formations, ideology, the labour process, class, the State, ISAs and RSAs, FMPs and CMPs, historians who have made these problems the object of sustained investigation have,

in general, been ignored, and they have returned the compliment with a disdainful silence.) Communication will flow in both directions of course. But what we do *not* need is 'a theory of history', in Althusser's sense. For this theory will be nothing but a thin enigma unless it is fattened on the content of substantive historical analysis. If we want to know *how* 'autonomous', and 'relative' to *what*, we may think the problem but then we must *find out*, and think again about our findings. We must put theory to work, and we may do this either by interrogating evidence (research) or by interrogating historiography and other theories (critique); and both these methods were the ones most commonly employed by Marx. Theoretical practice, which rejects the first procedure ('empiricism'), and which reduces the second procedure to caricature by measuring all other positions against its own pre-given orthodoxy, is evidence of nothing but the self-esteem of its authors. For the project of Grand Theory – to find a total systematised conceptualisation of all history and human occasions – is the original heresy of metaphysics against knowledge.

It is not only that this is like trying to catch running water in a sieve. It is not only that we can never reproduce with finality within the forms of thought:

... history, that never sleeps or dies,
And, held one moment, burns the hand.

It is not only that the attempt to do so, in a 'science' devoid of substance, ends up very much like Engels's characterisation of the Hegelian inheritance: 'a compilation of words and turns of speech which had no other purpose than to be at hand at the right time where thought and positive knowledge were lacking.'¹¹⁵ All this is not all. The project itself is misbegotten; it is *an exercise of closure*, and it stems from a kind of intellectual agoraphobia, an anxiety before the uncertain and the unknown, a yearning for security within the cabin of the Absolute. As such, it reproduces old theological modes of thought, and its constructions are always elaborated from ideological materials.

More than this, such total systems have, very generally, been at enmity with reason and censorious of freedom. They seek, not only to dominate all theory – or to expel all other theories as heresies – but also to reproduce themselves within social reality. Since theory is a closure, history must be brought to conform. They seek to lasso process in their categories, bring it down, break its will, and subject it to their command. Within the *last instance* we find the anagram of Stalin.

Nor is this all. There is also the matter of dialectics. Many critics have noted that Althusser has extruded, along with Hegel, dialectics. This should be apparent without further demonstration. I do not mean his extrusion of this or that 'law' of dialectics, as in his commendation of Stalin for his prescience in challenging the credentials of 'the negation of the negation.' The ontological status of any such 'laws' is questionable. I mean that even in the moment that Althusser acclaims *La Dialectique*, and boasts possessively as to his intimacy with her, he strikes her into a statuesque pose; and in that pose we recognise, once again, our old friend, *La Structure à Dominante*. She is modeling a new gown, which superbly expresses her inner contradictory nature:

This reflection of the conditions of existence of the contradiction within itself, this reflection of the structure articulated in dominance that constitutes the unity of the complex whole within each contradiction, this is the most profound characteristic of the Marxist dialectic. (F.M. 205–6; and above p. 112)

This gown is a reflection of contradiction, and the creation is presented to us by its designer under the name, 'over-determination'. The gown is fitted perfectly to the model's form; but it is so tight that *she cannot move*. In all of Althusser's texts, dialectics, conceived as the logic of the logic of process, never appears.

My readers will eagerly anticipate that a hundred page disquisition on dialectics will now ensue. I am sorry to disappoint them. It is beyond my competence. I wish only to make a few

observations, situating myself on the *outside* of an argument into whose complexities I would be foolhardy to enter. First, I am of the opinion that the understanding of dialectics can only be advanced if an absolute embargo is placed upon the mention of Hegel's name. This will appear to be absurd and whimsical. But I mean to argue it through. Manifestly, Engels and Marx 'owed' their dialectics to Hegel, often returned to Hegel, and often acknowledged their debt. All this has been examined by others, and with much ability, and I do not dispute the value of the examination. One day it should be resumed. But at this point the discussion is not only exhausted, it has become counter-productive. For its tendency has been to align its protagonists into 'Hegelian' Marxists, who, with whatever efforts at inversion, tend to see dialectics as a Hegelian suffusion *within* process; and anti-Hegelians (whether empirical 'historicists' or Althusserians) who tend, in effect, to discard dialectics along with Hegel.

But, second, the account which theorists offer of their procedures need not be the same thing as those procedures themselves. We may agree to reject the account which Engels offered in *The Dialectics of Nature*, but the matter cannot be ended there.¹¹⁶ There still remain the very motions of thought implicit in many passages of Marx and Engels' analysis, their procedures, and their self-consciousness of these procedures. When old Engels thundered out to Schmidt, 'What these gentlemen all lack is dialectic', he went on to adduce, not dialectical 'laws', but the mode of apprehension of a fluent and contradictory eventuation:

They never see anything but here cause and there effect. That this is a hollow abstraction, that such metaphysical polar opposites only exist in the real world during crises, while the whole vast process proceeds in the form of interaction (though of very unequal forces, the economic movement being by far the strongest, most elemental and most decisive) and that here everything is relative and nothing is absolute – this they never begin to see.

It is true that the letter ends: 'Hegel never existed for them.' Hegel (inverted) 'taught' them to see in this way. But let us think more about the seeing and less about the teacher. The great-great-grandchildren of 'these gentlemen' have read their *Logic* upside-down and backwards, but they have been taught nothing. 'Contradiction' is an antagonism, a 'motor' of struggle: it is not a moment of co-existent opposed possibilities. 'Reformism' must be incorporation within capitalist structures: it cannot *also* be reforms and the modification of those structures to allow a space for incorporation. And so on: and on and on. 'They never see anything but here cause and there effect.'

Thus it is always possible that (as Marx remarked of Spinoza) 'the real inner structure of his system is, after all, wholly different from the form in which he consciously presented it.'¹¹⁷ And, third, even if we set aside Hegel, we will still have to deal with William Blake. I offer Blake, not as a hitherto-unrecognised tutor of Marx, but in order to emphasise that the dialectic was not Hegel's private property. Blake reminds us of a very old, sometimes reputable, sometimes arcane hermetic tradition – often a tradition of poets – which sought to articulate modes of apprehension appropriate to a reality which was always in flux, in conflict, in decay and in becoming. Against the 'single vision' of mechanical materialism, Blake sought, and succeeded, to think co-existent 'contrary states' and to marry heaven and hell. We must agree that Hegel was the vector through whom this tradition was transmitted to Marx, and we may agree that this transmission was an ambiguous inheritance and that Hegel's attempt to objectify a mode of apprehension as laws was invalid. But this does not invalidate the mode of apprehension.

I am suggesting that Hegel obscures our vision. He gets between us and the light. If we set him aside, we may then more easily look directly at dialectics themselves. I am not certain what we shall see, except that it will certainly not be contradiction caught in a stationary pose. The attempt to see a logic inscribed within 'natural' process itself has been disabling and misleading. But from another aspect, we seem to be offering a description, within the terms of logic, of the ways in which we apprehend

this process.¹¹⁸

I am certain only that this mode of apprehension of 'double-edged, double-tongued' process is to be found in Marx and Engels' own practice. And (here I may speak confidently for others within 'my' tradition) that in my own work as a historian I have repeatedly observed this kind of process, and have, in consequence, come to bring 'dialectics', not as this or that 'law' but as a habit of thinking (in co-existing opposites or 'contraries') and as an expectation as to the logic of process, into my own analysis. How else are we to be prepared to understand the paradox that the apparent agent of socialist revolution, the CPSU (B), has become the organ which, above all, articulates and imposes upon the self-activating social and intellectual process of Russian society a system of *blockade*?

The eviction of dialectics from the Althusserian system is deplorable, but it flows as a necessary consequence from the inner stasis of structuralism.¹¹⁹ I am less sure that there is much to be gained from giving to 'the dialectic' elaborate logical and formal expression. We have often been told that Marx had a 'method'; that this method lies somewhere in the region of dialectical reason, and that this constitutes the *essence* of Marxism. It is therefore strange that, despite many allusions, and several expressions of intent, Marx never wrote this essence down. Marx left many notebooks. He was nothing if not a self-conscious and responsible intellectual worker. If he had found the clue to the universe, he would have set a day or two aside to put it down. We may conclude from this that it was not written because *it could not be written*, any more than Shakespeare or Stendhal could have reduced their art to a clue. For it was not a method but a practice, and a practice learned through practising. So that, in this sense, dialectics can never be set down, nor learned by rote. They must be learned only by critical apprenticeship within the same practice.

We will take leave of this section with some different observations. I promised at the outset to eschew the method of swapping quotations from Marx. I am not interested in the defence of Marxism as an orthodoxy. But we cannot dismiss as

irrelevant the question as to whether Althusser's reading of Marx is 'authorised' – whether indeed Marx's work had been mis-recognised (as a 'historicism') when it was always a structuralism, offering premonitions of the Althusserian orrery. A sufficient way of answering this question will be to note several of the devices which Althusser employs to validate his reading, not only as truly orthodox but as *more* orthodox than Marx.

We have noted one device, in the 'motor': to *gloss* a text ('thesis of the *Communist Manifesto*') and to *invent* from this gloss a 'basic Marxist proposition.' We have noted another, in the transmutation of analogies into concepts, and of analytic categories into substantive descriptions. A further essay could follow here on the Althusserian employment of 'in the last instance.' The 'last' instance (*in letzter Instanz*) may be variously rendered into English as 'in the last analysis', 'in the (court of) last resort', 'ultimately', 'in the final judgement.' That fine Communist scholar, Dona Torr, working ten hundred miles outside of academia, who first translated and edited the *Selected Correspondence*, in 1934, in those incredibly dim days when (as we were assured by Eagleton, Anderson and a dozen others) *soi-disant* British Marxists had nothing in their hands but a few impoverished polemical tracts – Dona Torr first rendered the passage in Engels's letter to Bloch – that passage, which becomes the axle of Althusser's oratory, but which, we recall, is abstracted from a letter which also supplies the script in which the old man is made to play a clown – she rendered it thus:

According to the materialist conception of history the determining element* in history is *ultimately* the production and reproduction in real life. More than this neither Marx nor I have ever asserted.

Thus *in letzter Instanz* appears first as 'ultimately', and, later in the letter, as 'in the last resort.' And at the asterisk* Torr allowed herself one of her rare editorial intrusions: '**Moment* – element in the dialectical process of becoming.' She was already, it seems, forty years ago, keeping a watchful eye on the horizon for the arrival of Althusser. This is what Althusser gives:

'production is the determinant factor.'¹²⁰ (*FM.* 111) – 'production' itself being another category which he and Balibar are intent to stabilise and re-ify. And how can a last *analysis* then become an 'instance' at a 'level', a 'political instance' or a 'legal instance' assigned an operative indicative force by *La Structure à Dominante*? What are we to make of Poulantzas's definition: 'By *mode of production* we shall designate . . . a specific combination of various structures and practices, which, in combination, appears as so many instances and levels . . .'¹²¹ How can a mode of production appear as so many *instances* (analyses, judgements, last resorts) unless it has become a metaphysical mode, producing neither goods nor knowledge, but reproducing itself endlessly in differentiating levels and instances, engendering only theoretical famine? 'But the truth is, they be not the highest instances that give the securest information':

As may be well expressed in the tale so common of the philosopher, that while he gazed upwards to the stars fell into the water; for if he had looked down he might have seen the stars in the water, but looking aloft he could not see the water in the stars.

We might describe this last device as 'transplantation.' An organ of one argument is cut out and put into the side of another. A more familiar device has already been well described as 'ventriloquism.'¹²² Althusser rarely allows Marx to speak: when he does, he throws his own voice into Marx. Or, which is little different, he *produces* Marx; prepares the scene; rehearses the script; presents a cue; and then a few lines, proper to that moment of the scene, are permitted. Let us follow through one example. Althusser has noted, with delight, a *footnote* in *Capital* – and, moreover, a note only to be found in the French edition – defining the word 'process':

The word 'procès' (process) which expresses *a development considered in the totality of its real conditions* has long been part of scientific language throughout Europe. In France it was first introduced slightly shamefacedly in its Latin form – *processus*. Then, stripped of this pedantic disguise, it slipped into books on chemistry, physics, physi-

ology, etc., and into works of metaphysics. In the end it will obtain a certificate of complete naturalization. (*L. & P.* 117; *P. & H.* 185).

The production requires at this point that Marx should speak a few lines to authorise Althusser's thesis of history as a 'process without a subject'; moreover, he wishes to catch the word 'process' (which the knowledgeable reader will know that Marx used rather freely) and put it under arrest. If historical process can be defined as 'a development considered in the totality of its real conditions' then it can be put back *inside* structure, as a mechanism to turn the orrery around. One way (an honest way) of approaching this question might have been through examining Marx's arguments in *Capital* at some central places in the text. But Althusser prefers a footnote limited to the French edition. He offers these lines as his authority. Why, then, did Marx choose such an obscure way to express a point of such importance? A chauvinist reply would be: 'Because only the French reader could have the logic to comprehend a point so nice.' But Althusser, at this point, is no chauvinist; he has a better argument – it was only the three or four years interval which had elapsed since the publication of *Capital* in German which had permitted Marx to clarify his own thought, 'which had allowed him to grasp the importance of this category and to express it to himself.' (*L. & P.* 117)

This is the production; it is superb. But the producer gets little assistance from his script; the dramatist has nodded. For the note defines *the word* 'process', as employed indifferently within works of chemistry, physics, physiology and metaphysics. The note says nothing, absolutely nothing, about how Marx sets the word to *work*, about Marx's notion of *historical* process (for this we must refer to his books). And it is self-evident from the note that it has been inserted in the French edition because the word has not yet been allowed 'naturalization', is unfamiliar in political and economic theory (or so Marx supposes), possibly because it offended against the fixity of categories in French logic, possibly because French intellectuals scrutinise with care the credentials of alien conceptual intruders before they are permitted familiar access to their discourse. And I do not say

this in criticism of the French. British intellectuals, so anxious to 'Europeanise' themselves, might learn something here from the caution of the French. There are some recent intruders – 'conjuncture', 'overdetermination', 'instance', 'structure-in-dominance' – whose certificates of naturalization should be refused.

We have noted these devices: invention: transmutation of analogies into concepts: improper conceptual transplants: 'ventriloquism' or 'production'. The most general device, however, is the employment of readings which are partial or which are wholly misleading, and in ways which cannot be 'innocent'. As a final example, we will follow one of these. We have already noted that Althusser, at an important place in his argument, cites the authority of *The Poverty of Philosophy*, Marx's polemic (in 1847) against Proudhon:

How, indeed, could the single logical formula of movement, of sequence, of time, explain the body of society, in which all economic relations co-exist simultaneously and support one another?

This appears, as we have seen (p. 126), at a critically-important stage of his argument for a structurally-synchronic mode of analysis. I do not think that there is any other text of Marx's which he works harder. This text is his licence to own an orrery. It is employed at at least four significant points in *Reading Capital* (*R.C.* 65, 66, 98, 107); it is 'rigorously expressed', and in 'those few lucid sentences' Marx 'warns us that he is looking not for an understanding of the mechanism of the production of society as a *result* of history, but for an understanding of the mechanism of the production of the *society effect* by this result.' (*R.C.* 66) These sentences, in a work which comes directly after the 'epistemological break' – one of the first utterances of the 'mature' Marx – are indeed of 'absolutely decisive scope', they direct us to the essence of his revolution in Theory, his discovery of 'science.'

It is not clear why this is so, but it is clear that the sentence must be supported by its context. To this we must return. The

context is chapter two of *The Poverty of Philosophy*, entitled 'The Metaphysics of Political Economy', and commencing with some observations on method. What has most annoyed Marx in *La Philosophie de la Misère* is Proudhon's pretention to a new metaphysical method: 'We are not giving a *history according to the order in time*, but *according to the sequence of ideas*.' In place of the sequence of actual history, Proudhon proposes to develop economic theories in 'their *logical sequence* and their *serial relation in the understanding*: it is this order that we flatter ourselves to have discovered.' (Proudhon, cited in C.W. VI, 162)

Marx's several observations develop, most emphatically, different aspects of the same objection: the metaphysical and unhistorical character of Proudhon's method. Bourgeois economists have developed 'the division of labour, credit, money, etc., as fixed, immutable, eternal categories', but 'they do not explain . . . the historical movement that gave them birth.' Proudhon takes these categories (from the economists) as given, and wishes to put them into a new sequential order, a serial relation in the understanding:

The economists' material is the active, energetic life of man; M. Proudhon's material is the dogmas of the economists. But the moment we cease to pursue the historical movement of production relations, of which the categories are but the theoretical expression . . . we are forced to attribute the origin of these thoughts to the movement of pure reason. (Ibid. 162)

This Marx sees as the heresy of metaphysics. Everything is presented, not in the analysis of social and historical reality, but as a sequence of abstracted logical categories:

Thus the metaphysicians who, in making these abstractions, think they are making analyses, and who, the more they detach themselves from things, imagine themselves to be getting all the nearer to the point of penetrating to their core – these metaphysicians in turn are right in saying that things here below are embroideries of which the logical categories constitute the canvas.

(We sit uncomfortably, and remember 'society effect', and men as *träger*: embroideries upon the canvas of structure). Marx thunders on:

If all that exists, all that lives on land and under water can be reduced by abstraction to a logical category – if the whole real world can be drowned thus in a world of abstractions, in the world of logical categories – who need be astonished at all?

All that exists, all that lives on land and under water, exists and lives only by some kind of movement. (Ibid. 163)

Proudhon has at least noticed this. And he seeks to enclose movement within his categories by means of a crude deployment of the Hegelian dialectic. But what he has done is to abstract movement itself into a series of logical categories:

Apply this method to the categories of political economy, and you have the logic and metaphysics of political economy, or, in other words, you have the economic categories that everybody knows translated into a little-known language which makes them look as if they had newly blossomed forth in an intellect of pure reason; so much do these categories seem to engender one another, to be linked up and intertwined with one another by the very working of the dialectic movement. (Ibid. 165)

We are now beginning to understand why Althusser held his hand so firmly over the text of *The Poverty of Philosophy*, and allowed us only to peep through his fingers at one single sentence. But if we are to understand the context of this sentence, and, therefore, Marx's meaning, we have to turn back for a moment from chapter two ('The Method') to chapter one, where Marx makes an entry directly into the question of Proudhon's concept of value. Proudhon seeks to explain the genesis of exchange value, not in its real historical genesis, but in its genesis within a sequence of logical categories: the 'history' is that of the genesis of *ideas* in 'serial relation in the understanding.' Proudhon presents this sequence in this kind of way:

Since a very large number of the things I need occur in nature only in moderate quantities, or even at all, I am forced to assist in the production of what I lack. And as I cannot set my hand to so many things, I shall *propose* to other men, my collaborators in various functions, to cede to me a part of their products in *exchange* for mine. (Proudhon, cited in Ibid. 111)

(As Marx remarks elsewhere, this is a characteristic petit-bourgeois notion of economic relations: the 'I' is a little master hatter or brass-founder, who would exchange in this way if the State, taxation, feudal privilege, did not intervene.)¹²³ From this 'logical sequence' (a 'history', but a history only in ideas, or ideology) Proudhon derives the division of labour. As Marx remarks, 'A man' sets out to '*propose* to other men . . .' that they establish exchange,' but Proudhon has not explained the genesis of this proposal, 'how this single individual, this Robinson, suddenly had the idea of making 'to his collaborators' a proposal, of the type *known* and how these collaborators accepted it without the slightest protest.' (Ibid. 112) This is a sample of what Proudhon describes as his 'historical and descriptive method' (Ibid. 113). The logical sequence of categories, one engendering the next in series, may then be placed within a small balloon named 'I', and this balloon may then be puffed up with rhetoric until it has become 'the impersonal reason of humanity', or, at another place, 'Prometheus', who, 'emerging from the bosom of nature', sets to work, and 'on this first day', his product 'is equal to ten':

On the second day, Prometheus divides his labour, and his product becomes equal to a hundred. On the third day . . . Prometheus invents machines, discovers new utilities in bodies, new forces in nature . . . (Proudhon, cited in Ibid. 157)

But (we scarcely need to rehearse Marx's critique) this is to invert the real historical sequence:

Labour is organised, is divided differently according to the instruments it has at its disposal. The hand-mill presupposes a different division of labour from the steam-mill. Thus it is slapping history in the face to

want to begin with the division of labour in general, in order to arrive subsequently at a specific instrument of production, machinery. (Ibid. 183)

In this sense, it is the machine which (historically) 'discovers' the division of labour and determines its particular forms.¹²⁴ We cannot usefully discuss the production of wealth 'without the historical conditions in which it was produced.' Put this 'Prometheus' back into history, and what does it turn out to be?

It is society, social relations based on class antagonism. These relations are not relations between individual and individual, but between worker and capitalist, between farmer and landlord, etc. Wipe out these relations and you annihilate all society . . . (Ibid. 159)

Thus the whole of *The Poverty of Philosophy*, a remarkable and cogent polemic, is a set of variations upon the theme of Proudhon's unhistorical metaphysics. This gives us the context, and hence the meaning, of Althusser's one sentence 'licence.' Economic categories are 'the abstractions of the social relations of production.' (Ibid. 165) But these relations are continually in movement, and the categories themselves are '*historical and transitory products*.' Proudhon seeks to wrest the categories from their context, eternalise them, and then re-order them as a serial relation in the understanding. (Ibid. 166) He does not wish to present 'history according to the order in time.' This 'real history' is, in Proudhon's view, only the 'historical sequence in which the categories have *manifested* themselves.' (Ibid. 169) But we can improve upon real history 'by taking the economic categories . . . successively, one by one . . .' (Ibid. 168) As a result, for Proudhon, 'everything happened in the *pure ether of reason*.' (Ibid. 169) But we cannot detach economic categories from their context in this way, since 'the production relations of every society form a whole.' Proudhon's serial relation of categories in the understanding leads him to consider 'economic relations as so many social phases, engendering one another, resulting one from the other like the antithesis from the thesis, and realising in their logical sequence the impersonal reason of

humanity.' But we cannot analyse productive relations, economic relations, as this kind of series, since all the relations (and the categories) coexist and presuppose each other. We must take these together as one set. To arrive at value, Proudhon 'could not do without division of labour, competition, etc. Yet in the *series . . . in the logical sequence*, these relations did not yet exist':

In constructing the edifice of an ideological system by means of the categories of Political Economy, the limbs of the social system are dislocated. The different limbs of society are converted into so many separate societies, following one upon the other. *How, indeed, could the single logical formula of movement, of sequence, of time, explain the structure of society, in which all relations coexist simultaneously and support one another?* (Ibid. 166-7: my italics)

We have arrived at last at Althusser's talisman, the jewel of 'absolutely decisive scope.' But Marx has not finished. In the next observations he posts on. Proudhon has dislocated the 'limbs' of the social system, and given these as separate 'societies' – production, exchange, a monetary system, distribution – following one upon the other in a logical, categorical sequence. We have to reconstitute these limbs, and see them as acting together. But how are we to do this, unless within 'real history', the history within which these relations were engendered? When we do this, we return once again to the point of origin of the economists' material, 'the active, energetic life of man.' And when we do so, the illusion of bourgeois economics – that society is the effect of categories, and that men are the carriers of structures – is at last dispelled:

We are necessarily forced to examine minutely what men were like in the eleventh century, what they were like in the eighteenth, what were their respective needs, their productive forces, their mode of production, the raw materials of their production – in short, what were the relations between man and man which resulted from all these conditions of existence. To get to the bottom of all these questions – what is this but to draw up the real, profane history of men in every century and to present these men as both the authors and the actors of their own drama? (Ibid. 170)

Does the point need explaining further? Arguments, as well as production relations, form a whole. We cannot sever one limb, and that limb a tiny one (one sentence), the upper joint of a little finger. Marx's argument is at no point an argument against 'historicism'; it is an argument for integrative historical analysis against the disintegrative 'single logical formula' of Proudhon, as a serial relation of categories. Moreover, we can now understand Althusser's silence as to the substantial arguments of *The Poverty of Philosophy*. For the 'heresies' which Althusser wishes to unmask – the heresy of 'empiricism' ('to examine minutely what men were like'), the heresy of 'historicism' ('the real, profane history of men'), and the heresy of 'humanism' ('as both the authors and the actors of their own drama') – these heresies do not appear merely as the momentary 'blank of suspended rigour, scarcely the time of a lightning-flash in the darkness of the text' (see p. 141) – these are integral to the text, they *are* the argument, they *are* the thunder and the lightning which are hurled against Proudhon's darkness.

Moreover, it is only necessary to perform one small operation upon Marx's text – by changing at every point the name of Proudhon to Althusser – and it may be read as a sustained premonitory polemic against the latter's 'Theory'. It is true that Althusser has replaced Proudhon's sequential logic with an inconsequential logic. But the polemic strikes home every time: the fixity of categories; the engenderment of categories from pure reason rather than through historical analysis; the metaphysical heresy, categories engendering society and men as their effects; the mystifying 'novelty' of the vocabulary; the reorganisation of real history into a more proper categorical logic, 'as the development of forms' (structure swallowing process); the disintegrative method which separates a whole into 'limbs' ('levels', 'instances'); and the manipulation of these limbs in an ether of pure reason independently of the specificities of historical time and class. In going to the office of authority, and taking out this text, M. Althusser has made a big mistake. What he supposed was a licence to entertain the public with his orrery was in fact a court order to put down his own dog, 'theoretical

practice.' And the order is signed, 'Karl Marx.' And the order must be executed, instantly, by the public, if Althusser refuses. For the dog has bitten philosophy and sociology already, and made them mad.

A final observation. We will propose it in the form of a question. How does Althusser have the *neck*?

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So many pages! And yet we have only traced two of Althusser's ogres, 'historicism' and 'empiricism', to their lairs. Somewhere in the forest those even more hideous monsters, 'humanism' and 'moralism', still lurk. But I do not think that we will need so many pages to find them. As we have seen (p. 49), a ball rolls down the hill through its own innate energy and will. All of Althusser's subsequent propositions roll down in the same way, once he has placed them on this idealist summit.

It should also be clear, by now, that these propositions belong not to reason or to 'science' but to ideology; and therefore we can despatch them somewhat more briskly. That men and women are not agents in their own history, but *träger* – carriers of structures, vectors of process – must follow upon the concept of a 'process without a subject.' To suppose otherwise is to fall into the sin of 'humanism,' Althusser's first elaborated anathema against this sin appeared in an article, 'Marxism and Humanism', in 1964. Why did it appear *then*?

We shall see.

But to see we must make ourselves into historians for a moment. I am sure that my most critical readers will not accuse me of having confused, up to this moment, Theory with the sociology of ideology. Our critique has been 'rigorous', 'within Theory' and its 'discourse of the proof.' Well, most of the time. Not a syllable of the partisan or the personal has been allowed to intrude. Not often.

Now, however, we must not only admire Althusser's orrery (which we shall continue to do) but ask also why it was made, and whom it was intended to entertain? But, first, *the text*.

This is how it commences:

Today, Socialist 'Humanism' is on the agenda.

As it enters the period which will lead it from socialism . . . to communism . . . the Soviet Union has proclaimed the slogan: All for Man, and introduced new themes: the freedom of the individual, respect for legality, the dignity of the person. (F.M.221)

'This is a historical event', Althusser goes on. It is premonitory of a dialogue between Communists and men of goodwill 'who are opposed to war and poverty. Today, even the high-road to Humanism seems to lead to socialism.' But this is only a *seeming*. In fact, humanism ('Man') is a very foul bourgeois ideological concept, and one to which Marx himself was victim in his early manuscripts. He liberated himself from this concept in the course of his encounter with Feuerbach . . . the argument (the argument of Engels's *Ludwig Feuerbach*) is too familiar to rehearse. Beneath the grand phrases of 'humanity' was concealed the exploitation by the bourgeoisie of the proletariat. Hence revolutionary proletarian 'humanism' could only be a 'class humanism': 'for more than forty years, in the U.S.S.R., amidst gigantic struggles, "socialist humanism" was expressed in the terms of class dictatorship rather than in those of personal freedom.' (F.M. 221) But 'the end of the dictatorship of the proletariat in the U.S.S.R. opens up a second historical phase.'

In the U.S.S.R. men are indeed now treated without any class distinction, that is, as *persons*. So, *in ideology*, we see the themes of class humanism give way before the themes of a socialist humanism of the person. (F.M. 222)

Very nice. But, before we can order a stock of the same commodity for ourselves, we are sternly reminded that it is a product, not of Theory but of *ideology*. Ideology '*is as such an organic part of every social totality*.' Like it or not, even Socialist states must have 'ideology.' 'Human societies secrete ideology as the very element and atmosphere indispensable to their historical respiration and life.' (F.M. 232, 235) But this

particular ideological stock cannot be exported from the U.S.S.R.; indeed, it is a seed carefully prepared only for Siberian conditions. The 'world opening up before the Soviets' is one with 'infinite vistas of progress, of science, of culture, of bread and freedom, of free development . . . a world that can do without shadows or tragedies.' (FM. 238) But that is their world, not ours: 'the themes of socialist humanism (free development of the individual, respect for socialist legality, dignity of the person, etc.) are the way the Soviets and other socialists are *living* the relations between themselves and these problems, that is, the *conditions* in which they are posed.' (FM. 238-9) If we live in different conditions, we cannot cultivate the same crops. In 'China, etc.' only a 'class humanism' can as yet be grown. (FM. 222) And what of the capitalist West? Very clearly the stock cannot be imported. For it would be transmogrified in the passage, and would spring up, in these conditions, as a virulent bourgeois crop of anti-Communism. It would come up, not as socialist at all, but as the old ideological notion of 'Man'. For we must not forget for an instant the difference between ideology and sciences, and that 'the frontier separating ideology from scientific theory was crossed about one hundred and twenty years ago by Marx.' (FM. 246) 'Strictly in respect to theory, therefore, one can and must speak of *Marx's theoretical anti-humanism*. . .' (FM. 229)

Simply put, the recourse to ethics so deeply inscribed in every humanist ideology may play the part of an imaginary treatment of real problems. Once *known*, these problems are posed in precise terms: they are organisational problems of the forms of economic life, political life and individual life. (F. M. 247)

These problems must be given '*their scientific names*.' Thus we see that in *theory* (while it may do for the Soviet Union as ideology: i.e. rhetoric) 'socialist humanism' is the old enemy; it is the couple, abstract 'goodwill' (moralism) and 'Man' (humanism) in partnership against real Communism.

Very nice, again. But who are the *träger* or vectors of these

hideous ideological impurities? Can we envisage bourgeois 'socialist humanism' *in corpore vile*, and give it a local habitation and a name? *Who* is the ogre?

We shall see.

But, first, we must make two general observations on Althusser's procedures. (1) There is a method of 'theoretical practice' which I will describe as *The Kangaroo Factor*. We have noted long ago (p. 47) that this kind of idealism, since it prohibits any actual empirical engagements with social reality, is delivered, bound and gagged, into the hands of the most vulgar empiricism. That is, since it cannot know the world, the world must be assumed in its premises. And what is that world but the most vulgar manifestations and prejudices of 'what everyone knows'? Hence the theoretical practitioner proceeds in gigantic bounds through the conceptual elements, with the most gracious curvatures of thought; and while he is bounding he performs the most elegant acrobatic twirls and he paws the air with sublime gestures. But every so often (since the law of gravity cannot be disregarded for ever) he comes down: *bump!* What he comes down upon is an assumption about the world. But he does not linger on this assumption, sniff it, taste the grass. *Hop!* He is off into the air again.

I apologise. The analogy is grossly unfair to kangaroos, which bound forward with a purposive air to an objective, keep their paws tidily in place, and every now and then stop, eat, and survey the world. Theory hops onwards for ever, even through the Stalinist night.

Of course, if the reader shares already all of Althusser's 'common sense' – that the Soviet Union in 1964 was a land living the themes of dignity of the person, free development of the individual, respect for legality, etc. with 'infinite vistas' of progress, a world 'without shadows or tragedies' – then my analogy is wasted upon him. And he had better stop reading this essay, since these pearls are not for him.

We shall notice the *kangaroo factor* again.

(2) The second observation. Althusser's theoretical practice may be defined as a contestation without an opponent.

Throughout *For Marx* and *Reading Capital* his antagonists are scarcely ever (unless in an allusion, a footnote) defined. The practice is that of monologue, not dialogue, *within* the corpus of Marxist concepts. But this is not strictly true. At a few points opponents *are* defined, and these are: young Marx, Hegel, mature Marx (his blanknesses and failures of rigour), poor old Engels, and Gramsci. (I will not turn aside to defend that creative, but ambiguous, thinker; he does not require my defence, and he has defenders enough.) Apart from these moments of argument – an argument which is ‘produced’ – we have, not particular ogres – antagonists who developed particular arguments in definite places – but a generic *ogreism*. We have ‘empiricism’ without any empiricists, ‘historicism’ without any attention to historians, and now we have ‘humanism’ and ‘moralism’ without any faces. But no matter: we cannot see these ogres for a very good reason: they are hidden within the dense undergrowth of the forest of ‘bourgeois ideology.’

But then a very strange thing occurs. Suddenly, in 1972, an ogre does shamle out of the forest, dazzled and confused in the unaccustomed daylight. Hurriedly, an orthodox Communist audience is gathered around. And then, in the arena of Theory, A supreme tournament is staged, with an *actual* antagonist: Dr. John Lewis.

And why should he choose *this* opponent? We shall see.

Who was John Lewis? It is Althusser’s whimsy (for even rigour may be allowed its little jokes) to offer him as a youngish philosopher – perhaps a ‘man of goodwill’ who was *trying* to be a Marxist but who had not overcome the influence of Sartre¹²⁵ – and not, as he was, the elderly guardian of the tablets of the British Communist Party’s ideological law. Between 1945 and 1956, during the era of high Stalinism, Lewis was the editor of the party’s intellectual organ, *The Modern Quarterly*. The young are uncharitable, as I am now old enough to know. And no doubt I and my immediate friends in the Communist Party in those days took an uncharitable view of Lewis, in seeing him as a superintendent among ‘King Street’s’ ideological police, along

with Burns, Dutt, Garman, Klugmann and co. That is, in intellectual and cultural matters, he was two fixed points between which a ‘correct line’ could always be drawn. His own speciality – and he gave himself a generous allowance of the journal’s pages – was homiletics on Communism and ethics, morality and humanism.

Now this seems, at first sight, to conform exactly to Althusser’s requirements: Lewis is taken as a triple personification of the ogre, ‘dogmatism’, the ogre ‘humanism’, *and* the ogre, ‘moralism.’ These three ogres, of bourgeois origin, had slipped unobserved from their natural habitat, into the forest of *Stalinism*. In unmasking Lewis, Althusser is taking even further his long and rigorous project of unmasking the ‘Stalinian deviation.’ And it is the easier for him to do this by selecting an elderly target in the British Communist Party (which the leaders of the P.C.F. have always despised) rather than an ogre in his own party which might always bite back. Moreover, Althusser is able to present himself as being way ahead of his own lagging times, in the *avant-garde* of Theory: ‘In *For Marx* – that is, in 1965 – I was already writing about Stalin, about the Twentieth Congress of the Soviet Communist Party, and about the split in the International Communist Movement. John Lewis, on the other hand, writes as if Stalin had never existed. . . (*Essays*, 36)

But this is in fact not a tourney at all. It is a race, in the same direction, between two kangaroos. It is true that, while in the air, the kangaroos make different noises, in different national idioms; but since every other country is now allowed its own ‘national’ Marxism, why should not ‘Anglo-Marxism’ be allowed? If Franco-Marxism is permitted to utter, in Cartesian tones, the leçons of raison, why should Anglo-Marxism not emit, in the organ-tones of unitarian or theosophist chapel, the homilies of moral man? But both kangaroos hop to the same rhythm, go the same way, and land from time to time, bump, on the same clumps of unexamined ‘common-sense’ – the Party, Marxism-Leninism, and astounding illusions as to Soviet history and contemporary reality.

What Althusser is saying as to bourgeois ‘humanism’ as

ideology and as to proletarian 'class humanism' (embodied in the dictatorship of the proletariat in the Soviet Union embodied in the Party guided by Marxist science) is, exactly, what Lewis was saying in the high Stalinist years, and saying repetitiously to the exclusion of all other themes. This was Lewis's 'thing.' In 1946 ('The Great Moral Muddle') he started off hopping at the same point at which Althusser commenced in 1964. 'The soberest estimate of Soviet achievement', based on the reports of 'the most cautious investigators' reveal 'a respect for personality, an achievement of freedom from want and insecurity, an equality of opportunity, that has filled the Soviet people with boundless confidence and hope.' But Lewis saw all this placed on the agenda as early as the new Soviet Constitution, in 1936, in which Stalin proclaimed the 'equality of rights for citizens', secured by legal guarantees. He did not neglect to take us through the same Feuerbach routines. 'Ethics can only be understood in terms of the class interests they are called upon to serve'; 'to make an ideal effective it must become the ideal of a class, that is to say it must express the actual interest of a class.' ('Marxism and Ethics', 1950). Thus we have Althusser's 'class humanism.'

Hence also the new humanism of socialism realised. This does not arise 'from metaphysical principles, or from the acceptance of some utopian ideal or set of abstract moral principles.' On the contrary, it must be seen, like Althusser's 'ideology', as 'the moral aspect of a particular mode of production.' This is the basis of 'the new morality' in Russian. ('The Moral Complexion of Our People', 1951). But, like Althusser again – for they are both still way up, in the air, at the apex of their graceful curve – there is the same stern prohibition upon the import, to the capitalist world, of 'the new morality' in the form of abstract principles. 'It is against the background of the complete moral collapse of bourgeois society that we have to put the bad conscience which projects all the wickedness of which it is guilty upon the new and nobler world that is coming to birth.' 'The stalwart champions of eternal principles' must be exposed as wearing 'class interests behind the mask of absolute values.'

But there is no need for the proletariat to wear this mask, for 'the realisation of proletarian aims makes possible for the first time a truly human morality . . .' This is achieved 'by means of a class victory, inspired by a class morality . . . There is no other way in which a morality which is above classes can be realised.'

It is here that the gestures and tones of Lewis and Althusser (both still way up) diverge a little – the accents of *raison* and those of moral plenitude:

Because the workers know that in fighting for their own emancipation they are fighting for all mankind, the ethical drive behind their movement far exceeds both in purity and intensity that which inspired all preceding systems of class ethics and becomes one of the most potent of those energising and mobilising forces which, as Stalin has pointed out, play such a vital part in the development of society. ('Marxism and Ethics').

Now both our moralists descend to the ground, and not very far from the point they started from. This ground, for Althusser, is a Soviet world 'with infinite vistas of progress'; a world 'that can do without shadows or tragedies.' True, they call this utopia by different names: for Althusser it is the world of Theory Realised, of Science Incarnate; for Lewis it is the world of Truly Human Man:

It is because the leading members of the Soviet Commonwealth are imbued with a morality which leads them to *respect and care for people* that they succeeded in their great task. They owe much of this finely human attitude to Stalin, whose deep wisdom and broad humanity has long inspired the Party, as it now inspires the state of which he is the leader. His ethics and the whole of moral aim of the Soviet state are well summed up in his own moving declaration of the supreme value of human personality. 'Our leaders,' he says, 'should display the most solicitous attitude towards our workers . . . We must learn to value people . . . It is time to realise that of all the valuable capital the world possesses, the most valuable and most decisive is people.' ('The Moral Complexion of Our People')

And when did Stalin say this? In his address to the Graduates from the Red Army Academy in 1935. How unfortunate it was

that so many of these graduates turned out, in the next two years, to be, not 'people' at all, but 'alien elements', the *träger* of capitalist conspiracy, who merited liquidation.¹²⁶

Lewis, then, was a very parfit, gentle kangaroo. The rhetoric was different here and there ('man'/'masses': socialist 'ideology'/new morality); but the essential arguments and assumptions of both men were the same. How is it, then, that John Lewis should shamble, in 1972, as the ogre of 'humanism' out of the forests of bourgeois ideology? And how is it that Althusser's arguments, first commenced in 1964, may be presented as the initiation of a rigorous critique of the 'Stalinian deviation', while Lewis, presenting *the same arguments*, in the years between 1946 and 1956, should be seen as an exemplar of that deviation? And why does the whole tourney, and the ground on which it is fought, seem so unreal?

We shall see.

I am sorry to be so tedious. These last pages bore me inexpressibly. But I am trying to unravel a tangle of wool. And I am trying to do this patiently, for the benefit of a generation which thinks itself to be 'post-Stalinist' (but which, very often, is *not*), whose 'rigour' has enabled them to repudiate, along with 'historicism', the most elementary knowledge of the immediate past of the Communist movement, in Russia, in Britain, in France. This innocence is allowing them to be made, every day, the victim of a gigantic confidence trick, in which resurgent Stalinism presents itself as Anti-Stalinism, and in which the long, explicit, and arduous critique of Stalinism sustained in a thousand places and a thousand struggles on the Left is presented as 'bourgeois ideology.' The tourney between these identical twins, dogmatism and *dogmatisme*, was faked up by Althusser to further this trick.

It is all done by mirrors. We have been drawn into an illusionist's parlour. Let us return again to the 1964 article: why did Althusser then find it necessary to demystify 'socialist humanism'? Was it because of some grave error already committed by John Lewis? No: so far as I know, Lewis was not in the habit of coupling those words. But the words stir a faint

memory in my mind. For there were other people, a lot of other people in leading positions in the international Communist movement who were denouncing 'socialist humanism' between 1956 and 1964. Thus I recall Arnold Kettle, the token representative of British Culture on the executive of the British Communist Party, denouncing 'middle class people ... spouting a lot of pious generalisations about socialist humanism.'¹²⁷ By these middle class people he can scarcely have been referring to himself, nor to John Lewis, nor even to Althusser, who was, in 1964, to give muted approval to the term – but only as *ideology*, and only in the Soviet Union.¹²⁸ On every side the mirrors reflect back upon each other; but every one is empty; in none is any actual ogre to be seen.

And then, as I screw up my eyes, and gaze intently in the nearest mirror, the terrible realisation comes. There I am staring into the bloated visage and bared fangs of the most hideous of ogres. And it is myself! M. Althusser has done me the incomparable tribute of addressing an article to *me*!

Readers will pardon the egotism of this hyperbole. Of course we cannot suppose that a publication emanating from Yorkshire would have been attended to in Paris. But I was, from 1957, co-editor of a journal, *The New Reasoner*, subtitled 'A Quarterly Journal of Socialist Humanism'. And in the first number of that journal I was the author of a long, immature, but not, I think, radically mistaken article on 'Socialist Humanism', which was, very specifically, a critique of Stalinist ideology and practice.¹²⁹ It was part of an international discourse, and, if it did not reach Paris, it certainly reached Moscow. For I received more than one tribute from Soviet theorists. This in *Oktober* (1958) I was singled out for special commendation:

One of these crusaders ... is Edgar Thompson, the acknowledged leader of the British revisionists, one-time editor of *The Reasoner*, the journal which fell into oblivion so quickly. [It was ordered to cease by the E.C. of the British C.P. E.P.T.], and now editor of *The New Reasoner* which has its inglorious existence today. . .

My article on 'Socialist Humanism' was particularly noted: 'Thompson repeats slanders which . . . are served up in one form or another by revisionists of all shades.'¹³⁰ In *Novy Mir* (1958) the tributes were even more touching. The journal of 'Socialist Humanism' was noted as being conducted by a 'group of renegades': 'the venal scribblers writing in the reactionary imperialist press could well sue the author for plagiarism: Thompson assiduously rehashes their fantasies about 'Stalinism', 'Zhdanovism', about the suppression of the individual in the U.S.S.R.; fervently he calls for nothing less than a "revolt" against Soviet ideology.' 'Like all traitors . . . like all renegades and anarchists', E. Thompson uses the term socialist humanism as –

A smoke-screen . . . to proclaim the identity of proletarian class morals with 'an administrative, bureaucratic, despotic attitude to human beings.' Calling for a revolt 'against inhumanity' this philosophizing slanderer in every possible way counterposes the abstract 'man in general' to society, to the collective, to the communist party. Far-reaching claims for some kind of allegedly new 'socialist humanism' are concluded with the following declaration: 'It is *humanism* because it places once again real men and women at the centre of socialist theory and aspiration instead of the resounding abstractions – the Party, Marxism-Leninism-Stalinism, the Two Camps, the Vanguard of the Working Class – so dear to Stalinism.'¹³¹

Perhaps – since ogres are notorious for their vanity – I may quote also the next sentence (neglected by *Novy Mir*) – which exposes my hideous project even further: 'It is *socialist* because it re-affirms the revolutionary perspectives of Communism, faith in the revolutionary potentialities not only of the Human Race or of the Dictatorship of the Proletariat but of real men and women.'

There my face is, hideous, contorted with renegade malice, drooling with bourgeois spittle. We might notice also that Mr Ozerov, the gifted theorist of *Novy Mir*, had anticipated Althusser's method of exposure: 'this philosophizing slanderer . . . counterposes the abstract "man in general" to society . . . –

although, as it happens, I had counterposed 'real men and women' to the abstractions so dear to Stalinism. My premises were 'men, not in any fantastic isolation or definition, but in their actual, empirically perceptible process of development under definite conditions.'¹³² And quite a lot of those men, under the abstract draperies of Marxist orthodoxy, were already dead.

So let us stop fooling and picking: the wool has come free. I do not know who first revived 'socialist humanism' as the motto of the Communist libertarian opposition in 1956, although certainly *The New Reasoner* carried it to some parts of the English-speaking world. But it arose simultaneously in a hundred places, and on ten thousand lips. It was voiced by poets in Poland, Russia, Hungary, Czechoslovakia; by factory delegates in Budapest; by Communist militants at the eighth plenum of the Polish Party; by a Communist premier (Imre Nagy), who was murdered for his pains. It was on the lips of women and men coming out of gaol and of the relatives and friends of those who never came out.

After November 4th, 1956, when Soviet forces blasted into Budapest, there was initiated a general disciplinary action through the international Communist movement: to re-impose the disciplinary controls of State or Party, to re-establish ideological orthodoxy – in effect, to reconstruct, within changed conditions, Stalinism without Stalin. This proceeded, in differing circumstances and different countries, at a different pace and in different forms; in one place, a palpable police action (Nagy shot, Tibor Dery gaoled, anti-Stalinist militants of the Budapest Workers Councils one or the other); in another place, the expulsion of 'revisionists', the closure of dissident journals, the re-establishment of the most rigid Stalinist norms of democratic centralism. Alongside this, of course, there was an ideological police action. The 'main enemy' was seen to be, not Trotskyism (which was a subordinate tendency within the opposition), but 'revisionism', 'renegades', 'petty bourgeois elements', and their ideological virus was identified as 'moralism' and as – 'socialist humanism.'

Thus we can see the emergence of Althusserianism as a manifestation of a general police action within ideology, as the attempt to reconstruct Stalinism at the level of theory. This is not to say (things are never as simple as that) that the leaders of the French Communist Party immediately appointed Althusser as chief of ideological police. They distrusted *all* philosophy, as an infected area; Althusser's language was difficult, and his 'rigour' ('theoretical anti-humanism') deprived them of some antique rhetoric – for the special virtuosity of the older kangaroo consisted in demonstrating (with apt quotations from Stalin) that *whatever* happened in the Communist world constituted a Victory for Man. John Lewis has shown us that. It was only after *Reading Capital* (1965) – and after a sharp dispute – that an understanding was come to, and that Waldeck Rochet, the Secretary-General of the P.C.F., spent a long day (June, 1966) with Althusser, 'talking about Spinoza.' (*Essays*, 104) This understanding reproduced an old project of the Enlightenment. The absolute monarch (the Party) agreed to be enlightened by the *philosophe* (Theory).¹³³ The price of the pact, for Althusser, may be seen in a little subsequent tinkering with his orrery (ambiguous confessions of 'theoreticism'), in the increasing brutality of his formulations (RSAs and ISAs, 'philosophy as class struggle') and in his posturings as a veteran militant of true class war, smelling of the cordite of innumerable arduous contestations with bourgeois heresy.¹³⁴ And also – and here is the parlour of mirrors – with 'dogmatism' and Stalinism.

I am concerned, in this essay, with theory. I will comment further on the actual history in another place.¹³⁵ But I am entitled, as I think, to locate this particular theoretical problem in this way. In terms of chronological time (which, as we know, is 'ideological') M. Althusser is some six years older than me. But in true, structural, theoretical time, I am (by the same number of years) his political senior. I joined the Communist Party in 1942, at the age of eighteen. Althusser joined the P.C.F. in 1948, at the age of thirty. I know nothing about his prior history (which is irrelevant to Theory), except that he was 'active' as a member of the Jeunes Etudiants Catholiques. His

initiation into the Communist movement came at a time when the voluntarism of the anti-fascist war and the Resistance was receding, and the rival structures (political and ideological) of the Cold War had congealed. The whiff of cordite which is brought to us in his reminiscent allusions is not that of men 'making history' but that of 'the Stockholm Appeal and of the Peace Movement' (*EM*. 22) – that is, of a period in which the necessary struggle for peace was fought by the blind on a ground of falsehood and under the banner of illusion. When the illusions were finally dispelled, in 1956, it was Althusser's business to sew up people's eyes and block their ears, to put the whole corrupt structure of falsehood back in a more sophisticated form.

I was never deceived by this structure for an instant. Nor were my comrades and friends. We knew it of old, we knew it *all too well*. Althusser was (for us) the ancient enemy, the reasons of Stalinist power. But to a 'post-Stalinist generation' the trick is passed. This rigorous critic of 'dogmatism', 'economism' (supply as required), almost on his own (*Essays*, 84), set himself the arduous task of restoring Marxist science; 'already', in 1965, he was 'writing about Stalin' (*Ibid.* 36). By 1972 he was able, at 'personal risk', to advance a 'hypothesis' as to a 'Stalinian deviation' (*Ibid.* 89, etc.).

'Already', in 1965! *So where was Althusser in 1956?* We know the answer. In truth, this 'already' should make me uncomfortable as well, as it should all penitent kangaroos: if 1956, why not 1953, 1948, etc.? But how was Althusser's 'critique' so unaccountably postponed? In 1956 it was, at length, officially 'revealed' that Stalinism had, for decades, been swatting down men like flies – Communists and non-Communists alike – and, after a further nine years, Althusser coughed, came out of his rigorous meditation, and muttered 'dogmatism'; after a further seven years, he coughed again, and risked the hypothesis of a 'deviation' ('the posthumous revenge of the Second International'!!) (*Essays*, 89); two or three years later, and he had a few severe words to say about Zhdanov and Lysenko.¹³⁶ But, on the other side of his face, he has been altogether more

voluble and incomparably more severe. The main enemy has been – socialist humanism.

And yet, socialist humanism was, above all, the voice of a Communist opposition, of a total critique of Stalinist practice and theory. How on earth could the Althusserian illusion have been passed, even for an instant? It had to be supported by other illusions, each of them mirrors of the first. We have time now to admire only three. First, there was the ancient trick (itself a circle of mirrors) which identified all opposition as, by definition, ‘objectively’, the voice of reactionary imperialism. Proposition 1: these critics attack the Party, Marxism, etc. Proposition 2: but the Party *is* the ultimate good, the guarantee of Theory, etc. Proposition 3: therefore these critics are enemies of all that is good and objectively they are imperialist swine. Thus the high theory of *Novy Mir*: thus Althusser – criticism of Stalinism, unless in terms prescribed by his theory, stems from ‘the most violent bourgeois anti-Communism and Trotskyist anti-Stalinism’ (*Essays*, 82–3) Q.E.D.

Second, reflected across the parlour, the criticism is ‘bourgeois’ – ‘middle class people’ spouting about socialist humanism. This criticism is most commonly found on the spouting lips of middle class people (Althusser, Kettle). As a characterisation of the social complexion of the Communist opposition in 1956 it is a direct lie. It was not more true of the workers of Poznan, of the spontaneous councils of Budapest, than it was to be of the initiatives for ‘socialism with a human face’ in Czechoslovakia in 1968¹³⁷ Nor was it true for those who composed the ‘party’ of socialist humanism in Britain in 1956. For the veteran leader of the Derbyshire miners, Bert Wynn, solidarity with our critique meant (as for many others) severing connections within his own heart; for the full-time organiser of the Leeds Communist Party, Jim Roche, formulating the positions of socialist humanism meant getting out his tools and returning to the cutter’s bench; for the pit delegate from Ballingry, Lawrence Daly, it involved a critique not only in theory but in political practice, as he initiated the Fife Socialist League, and carried the highly-politically-conscious miners of

West Fife along in its own ‘discourse’ of agitation; for the shop stewards” convenor at Briggs Motor Bodies (Dagenham) Johnny McLoughlin, it involved calling for an ‘organised movement of the Marxist anti-Stalinist Left.’ So that illusion is not only a lie, it is an insolent and élitist lie. And it stems from an ulterior intellectual contempt for the intelligence and moral sensibility of the working class.

Third, this lie is reflected in ormulu and guilt mirrors across the parlour. Socialist humanism (being, as we know, bourgeois) must of course be no more than a supine relapse into ‘bourgeois ideology’ – humanism, moralism, u.s.w. This illusion is the more interesting, in a theoretical consideration, since it is the one commonly passed on intellectuals. Stalinism blocks all exits from its system by defining in advance any possible exit as ‘bourgeois.’ And, alas, in this respect Trotskyism actually reinforced the Stalinist intellectual system, by rehearsing the same legends and setting up identical blocks. Thus, when I offered, in 1957, a critique of epistemological ‘reflection theory’, with reference to Lenin’s Materialism and Empirio-Criticism, Peter Fryer (a recent convert to Trotskyism) declared that I was waging ‘an all-out assault on the philosophy of dialectical materialism’, and taking a road ‘which leads inevitably into the swamp of subjectivism and solipsism.’...¹³⁸ Althusser, in a condescending little foreword (“To my English Readers”) to *For Marx*, patiently explains it thus:

The critique of Stalinist ‘dogmatism’ was generally ‘lived’ by Communist intellectuals as a ‘liberation’. This “liberation” gave birth to a profound ideological reaction, ‘liberal’ and ‘ethical’ in tendency, which spontaneously rediscovered the old philosophical themes of ‘freedom’, ‘man’, the “human person” and ‘alienation’. (*F.M.* 10)

(It must be difficult to ‘speak’ a theory like this, when at every second word, one must ‘contort’ one’s features into a knowing ‘leer’, to ‘signify’ to the reader that one ‘knows’ *the true meaning* of these words behind their apparent ‘meaning’.) In 1972 he had become more blunt; he had only one recourse to inverted

commas; 'after the Twentieth Congress an openly rightist wave carried off (to speak only of them) many Marxist and Communist "intellectuals", not only in the capitalist countries, but also in the socialist countries.' (*Essays*, 83)¹³⁹

So that is what we all were – 'an openly rightist wave'. Almost alone, Althusser confronted the danger. He wrote *For Marx* 'to combat the contagion which was "menacing" us.' It is strange that this 'rightist wave', this 'contagion', although it swept in men and women of all occupations and ages, should have swept most strongly through the generation of the anti-fascist struggle and the Resistance, through the generation most possessed still by the illusions of voluntarism (that they were 'makers of history'), the generation which Althusser appears to have missed.

This, then, is the missing protagonist with whom Althusser wrestles in *For Marx* and *Reading Capital*: the anti-Stalinist revolt, the total intellectual critique, which converged for a time under the motto: 'socialist humanism.' Please don't misunderstand me: I am not offering 'socialist humanism' as an alternative orthodoxy, nor as an adequate definition of all that this critique entailed, nor yet as a motto endorsed on every side. The term has had its own ambiguous history and I am not so tender at the passing of time as to wish to preserve it in theoretical amber. But his, if anywhere, is where all these critiques and actions converged.

This is the object of Althusser's police action, the unnamed ghost at whom his arguments are directed. But the ghost is allowed no lines of his own. The reader of the 'post-Stalinist generation' is encouraged to suppose him to be some timid intellectual, remote from any political action, 'shocked' in his bourgeois moral sensibility, putting on his glasses, peering at Marx's 1844 manuscripts, and collapsing back into a 'rightist' Feuerbachian complacency. This also is a direct lie. The actual themes of the critique: the structure and organisation of the Party: the control of the membership by the full-time apparatus: the Moscow orientation (and training) of that apparatus: the self-perpetuating modes of control ('democratic centralism', the

'panel' system, the outlawing of 'factions') – and from thence to the wider political and intellectual themes: none of these themes appear.

Of course, if one defines oneself as being in the middle of a sea, then any other waves *must* be on the 'right' or on the 'left'. The other waves will see it differently. From my own position, I cannot conceive of any wave in the working-class movement being further to the 'right' than Stalinism. From any consideration of working-class self-activity, of socialist liberty, how is it possible to be further to the 'right' than the anti-historicism and anti-humanism of Althusser?

But there is a final, an ultimate, illusion still to be performed. 'Socialist humanism' may be the ghost with which Althusser was arguing. But, it turns out, this was only the *alias* for an even greater ghost, the unnamed ogre whose shadow falls across his lines. In 1972 this ogre is finally named: socialist humanism is the mask of Joseph Stalin! Not Stalin himself, please be clear: for behind the mask, Stalin's visage is unclouded, proletarian, and theoretically unblemished: his thought 'continues to hold itself comfortably above the uproar, in its bases, its "line" and certain of its practices' (*Essays*, 83). But in certain *other* of its practices we may detect the 'Stalinian deviation', and this is the twin, 'economism/humanism', which must always be taken as 'an ideological pair.' Stalin's 'economism' was 'hidden by declarations which were, in their own way, cruelly "humanist".' (*Essays*, 85, 91) We are to suppose that 'deviation' arose from a certain absent-mindedness, a relapse into the rhetoric of bourgeois ideology. Excessively preoccupied with building a productive 'base' ('economism') he slipped into exalted reveries about the 'New Soviet Man', and did not notice what was happening to 'productive relations' (i.e. men and women) in between. Hence 'socialist humanism' – an 'imaginary treatment of real problems' is only a new projection of the 'Stalinian deviation.'

And now a contortionist is brought on to illustrate the trick. A certain Grahame Lock, who has felt himself called upon to introduce the latest writings of Althusser and Balibar to a British

public, takes up the centre of the parlour and glosses the texts. Economism is 'to forget about class struggle, and to forget about class struggle is *humanism*.' Stalin was forgetful in this way, and 'fell into both economism and humanism.' Hence he fell (just as we were to do in 1956) into certain traps prepared by the cunning of the bourgeoisie. The *gulags*, faked trials, and all that 'were *bourgeois methods* used against the bourgeoisie, and they backfired disastrously.'

The trials and purges played a role *determined in the last instance by the class struggle inside the USSR*, even if in practice their victims were the 'wrong ones'. (*Essays*, 14-15)

We will leave Mr Lock there, wriggling on the floor, one foot behind his neck, the other in his mouth. We have only introduced him for the purposes of light relief.

This whole section has been awful. Theory is so much clearer than history. I have written it only out of compassion for the innocence of a 'post-Stalinist generation.' One day or the other they would have to be told. I have tried to unravel a tangled skein, to explain the function of Althusserianism as an ideological police action *against* any fundamental socialist critique of Stalinism, but a police action which presents itself (through a series of distorting mirrors) as exactly such a critique. I hope that I may have dispelled these illusions in two or three minds.

But even if doubtfully convinced, these minds will still propose further questions. As they should. They may ask: 'Why do you drag us back into all this old stuff? The sins were committed long ago, in another country, and, anyway, the wench is dead. they have all been confessed. And Euro-Communism is a thoroughly reformed character. Why should we, of a post-Stalinist generation, be haunted by your memories?'

My answer may be brief or extended. The brief answer is this. You are *not* a 'post-Stalinist generation.' You are a generation amongst whom the reasons and legitimations of Stalinism are,

by means of 'theoretical practice', being reproduced every day.

We may now extend this answer. The agenda presented to each generation is *always*, in good part, presented to it by the past. 'My' socialist generation was not 'responsible' for Fascism or for Stalinism. We found these already there when we came of age. We dealt with the first, and we neglected, for too long, the second. Hence it was transmitted, as perhaps the largest of all problems, to socialists today.

We must distinguish – as with all such phenomena – between Stalinism as a particular historical/political/sociological eventuation, and the ideology, institutions, and practices which arose within that particular moment of eventuation. Stalinism, in the first sense, certainly belongs to the past. It was not cunningly planned, nor – as Althusser and Lock appear to suppose – was it the outcome of some 'deviation' *in theory*, some momentary lapse in Stalin's theoretical rigour. It was the product of baffled human agency, within a desperate succession of contingencies, and subject to the severe determinations of Soviet history. This very difficult examination must be pursued in its own right. At a certain point, Stalinism may be seen as a systematic social formation, with a consonant ideological logic and legitimation – Marxism-Leninism-Stalinism.

Thus from his historical matrix there emerged Stalinism, in a second sense. Stalinism was not just certain 'errors' or unsatisfactory practices, which, after some twenty years, even Althusser is able to call 'crimes.' We are not only (please remember) just talking about some millions of people (and most of these the 'wrong' people) being killed or *gulaged*. We are talking about the deliberate manipulation of the law, the means of communication, the police and propaganda organs of a state, to blockade knowledge, to disseminate lies; to slander individuals; about institutional procedures which confiscated from the Soviet people all self-activating means (whether in democratic modes or in forms of workers' control), which substituted the Party for the working class, the Party's leaders (or leader) for the Party, and the security organs for all; about the confiscation and centralisation of all intellectual and moral

expression, into an ideological state orthodoxy – that is, not only the suppression of the democratic and cultural freedoms of ‘individuals’: this even Euro-Communism has come to regret (and we are glad that this is so) although, even in the moment of regretting, it is sometimes implied that these freedoms of individual dissent are ‘extras’, additions to the menu of socialist construction, which, after sixty years, the Soviet State should be able to afford: it is not only this, but within the confiscation of individual ‘rights’ to knowledge and expression, we have the ulterior confiscation of the processes of communication and knowledge-formation of a whole people, without which neither Soviet workers nor collective farmers can know what is true nor what each other thinks.

From this historical matrix, then, there emerged Stalinism as a set of institutions and practices. And along with these there emerged the apologia, the theoretical legitimization of the practice. Spreading outwards from the Soviet Union, through the Comintern, this permeated the entire international Communist movement. The practices and the ideology were replicated, and the agents of this replication (the inner and trusted bureaucracies of national Communist parties) became, by a very exact analogy, the priesthood of a universal Church, adept at theological apologetics and ‘humanistic’ homiletics, directly and knowingly deceiving their own memberships, agile in casuistry, and reinforcing their control by distinctively Stalinist procedures and forms – ‘democratic centralism’, the suppression of faction and discussion, the exclusive control of the Party’s political, theoretical and (as far as possible) intellectual organs, the slander of critics and opponents, and the covert manipulation of fellow travellers and front organisations. It is not true that international Communism ‘did not know’ about Stalinism, prior to the Twentieth Congress of the CPSU; it both knew a great deal, and endorsed it, and it did not *wish* to know about the rest, and denounced this as slander; what it ‘did not know’ was that it was now ‘correct to denounce as the crimes of *one man* what it had previously exalted and apologised for, in the language of Marxist theory.

It will be seen that I am – as *Novy Mir* and Althusser predicted of socialist humanism – falling back upon ‘the most violent bourgeois anti-Communism and Trotskyist anti-Stalinism.’ But at least I am not hopping like a kangaroo. Every single point in the last two paragraphs is abundantly documented, and not only in the works of scholars who may conveniently be ruled out of court as ‘bourgeois hacks’, but by Soviet and socialist authors (Victor Serge, Deutsch, Lewin, Claudin, Medvedev). Some part of it I can confirm by direct experience. Members of a ‘post-Stalinist generation’ who have agonised over Balibar and Lacan but who have not acquainted themselves with the elementary history of socialism in this century might postpone their theoretical practice until they have dried themselves behind the ears.

But, if I may speak for ‘my’ generation, for the moment of total contestation *within* Stalinism – that is, between Stalinism and alternative Communist traditions and forms – which was most manifest in ‘1956’, then two important reservations must be entered. First, we never, for one moment, said or supposed that this was *all* that international Communism was, or is, or was doing in those decades. Communists can never be reduced to agents of a Stalinist conspiracy; they were doing a hundred other things, many were important and within an alternative, authentic socialist tradition, some were heroic, and some of them no-one else would do. This is one reason why the contestations *within* Communism have been so sharp. Second, in our contestation with Stalinism we never allowed to lapse, for one moment, our contestation with capitalism and with Western imperialism. Not only this, but we never relapsed into the dishonest attempt to divorce Stalinism from its historical genesis in emergency and contingency, emergencies and contingencies supplied in good part by the furious hostility of international capitalism at the emergence of *any* socialist society. We never supposed that Stalinism was to be attributed in its origin to this or that theoretical ‘error’, nor to the innate evil will of Marxism, nor that analysis was ended by clucking our tongues in moral disapproval. We always saw international capitalism as a co-

parcener in socialist degeneration.

But that it was a profound degeneration, in actuality, in thought, and in organisational forms, we had no doubt. To combat this degeneration was the agenda which 'history' passed down to us. The generation of '1956' did not say that God had failed; we said that *we* had failed, and that we meant to clear that failure up. And so? Is not that moment still far in the past? And perhaps we *succeeded*? For many of that old Stalinist priesthood have died or been pensioned off. Contingencies and contexts have changed; in what we had supposed to be the corpse of international Communism, movement can be seen once again. It breathes and stirs its limbs. Perhaps the critique of '1956' was too precipitate, too passionate, too purist: but it was not altogether wrong? In mysterious ways, and through the basic instincts of the proletarian organism, Communism is proving capable of self-reform. Euro-Communism has left Stalinism long behind; it has passed resolutions against it; Althusser is pursuing a theoretical critique.

Some part of this is so. And that part is welcome. We have never supposed that Stalinism penetrated equally to all parts of the international movement. Nor have we ever proposed that Communism (in which 'we' also invested so many of our thoughts and acts) was an insanitary area. There *is* movement. There is even genuine self-questioning, real discussion, dialogue. It moves at different paces, here and there. With Italian Communism, which contained, in Gramsci, a moment of theoretical honour, it has moved in interesting ways. It has even moved in France. And M. Marchais, as we know, has promised that when he comes to power he will be kind to animals. My cat, who read this over my shoulder, laughed. But I did not laugh. I think that, in certain favourable contingencies, and, recalling, above all, the libertarian traditions of the French and Italian peoples, expressing themselves within the membership of these mass parties, and imposing their will upon the leaderships – given all this, the outcome of Communist participation in governments of the Left might be one which opened new and more democratic socialist possibilities. All this is possible, as

historical eventuation.

But this does not mean that the project of '1956' has been fulfilled. For, even if we take the most generous view of these changes and the most optimistic view of future tendencies, this project can only be fulfilled on one condition: that the agenda of 1956 is carried through to the bitter end. Of course, Stalinism as historical eventuation belongs to the past; it will not come back in that form; the future will eventuate in other ways. And, of course, there are plenty of opportunistic reasons why Western Communist Parties wish that the smell of the past would go away. It is an electoral inconvenience that Solzhenitsyn should appear in the capitalist press every other day. No-one *wanted gulags* to happen, and no-one – certainly not M. Marchais – wants them to happen in France. Stalinism belongs to the past. We are already moving on.

And yet, *does it* belong to the past? For it was, not only a particular historical eventuation, but also one of the ultimate disasters of the human mind and conscience, a terminus of the spirit, a disaster area in which every socialist profession of 'good faith' was blasted and burned up. And if one was bred in *that* area, hopping about and proclaiming it to be utopia, does one get out of it by only a few more opportunist hops?

So let us stop playing the 'generation game.' If we consider Stalinism in its second sense, as a set of institutional forms, practices, abstracted theories, and dominative attitudes, then the 'post-Stalinist generation' has not yet been born. Stalinism, in this sense, gave to us the agenda of the present, and its forms and modes 'weigh like an alp' on the brains of the living. And the living (never mind which generation) need their combined strength to shift that alp. If you have had an alp on your mind, you will know that it is not removed by a theoretical shrug of the shoulders ('economism', 'humanism').

I do not only mean that the Soviet Union, the largest alp of all, is governed by practices and legitimated by a State ideology ('Marxism') which is directly derivative from Stalinism. (I may safely predict that, over the next twenty years, we will have sufficient lurid reminders of that; that the multiform self-assertions

of the Soviet people will, more often than not, appear as a nausea with the Party and its ideology; and that M. Marchais will meet with repeated electoral disappointments.) I do not only mean that enigmatic China revives, year by year, more disturbing memories; that when the country's most respected leaders and Marxist *clairvoyants* became overnight a 'gang of four', we do not understand what is happening but we do know that neither we nor the Chinese people will be told, and we remember, uneasily, previous exposures of 'traitors' at the peaks of power. Nor do I only mean that there are certain *continuities* in the personnel, forms, procedures, vocabulary, strategies and methods of 'reformed' Euro-Communist parties – continuities which may be modified by opportunist measures but which, very often, may not be subjected to a sustained and principled critique (unless by an 'enemy of the Party'). I have asked my cat, and he has explained that it is all this which made him laugh. But there is still something more than all these. It has been, throughout, the subject of this essay.

Stalinism, in its second sense, and considered as theory, was not one 'error', nor even two 'errors', which may be identified, 'corrected', and Theory thus reformed. Stalinism was not absent-minded about crimes: it *bred* crimes. In the same moment that Stalinism emitted 'humanist' rhetoric, it occluded the human faculties as part of its necessary mode of respiration. Its very breath stank (and still stinks) of inhumanity, because it has found a way of regarding people as the bearers of structures (*kulaks*) and history as a process without a subject. It is not an admirable theory, flawed by errors; it is a heresy against reason, which proposed that all knowledge can be summated in a single Theory, of which it is the sole arbiter and guardian. It is not an imperfect 'science', but an ideology suborning the good name of science in order to deny all independent rights and authenticity to the moral and imaginative faculties. It is not only a compendium of errors, it is a cornucopia out of which new errors ceaselessly flow ('mistakes', 'incorrect lines'). Stalinism is a distinct, ideological mode of thought, a systematic theoretical organisation of 'error' for the reproduction of more 'error.'

All this I could see, even if unclearly, as the smoke was rising above Budapest. Thousands of others, in a thousand different places, could see the same. I itemised the 'errors' of Stalinist theory, one by one: the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' (in its Stalinist version): the 'military vocabulary': the theory of the Party –

And the mechanical theory of human consciousness is wrong: the theory that historical science 'can become as precise a science as, let us say, biology': the subordination of the imaginative and moral faculties to political and administrative authority is wrong ... the fear of independent thought ... the mechanical personification of unconscious class forces ... all this is wrong.¹⁴⁰

And I identified also the reproductive organs of all this teeming 'error': 'the Stalinist mode of thought is ... that of mechanical idealism', and 'we must view Stalinism as an ideology ... a constellation of partisan attitudes and false, or partially false, ideas', 'establishing a *system* of false concepts within a mode of thought which ... in the Marxist sense ... is idealist.'¹⁴¹ Finally, I identified Stalin's own claim to pre-eminence as practitioner of this system. He was not only, as had recently been discovered on his birthday, the Greatest Marxist, Greatest Philosopher, Greatest Linguist, etc., but he was also the Greatest Kangaroo. For an idealist mode of this kind, must, of necessity, through its imperviousness to 'empirical' discourse, repeatedly reproduce 'mistakes' and 'wrong results.' 'The Stalinist oscillates between the axiom and *realpolitik*, dogmatism and opportunism. When the axioms cease to produce results a "mistake" is recognised. But the cornucopia from which "mistakes" flow in such abundance is never recognised.'¹⁴² *Hop!* – (dialectical materialism) – *hop!* – (theoretical practice) – *bump!* At the end of that high theoretical exercise: Khrushchev's secret speech.

Yes, all of this thousands of us could see. But we could not, finally, identify the organisation of Stalin's theoretical structure. This was not only owing to our own incompetence. It was also because that structure, in its pure theoretic beauty and conceptual coherence, had not yet been made. For Stalin was a

mixture of Marxist theorist, pragmatist, and hypocrite. Some bits of the system he had time to attend to (the 'superstructure is created by the basis precisely in order to serve it') but it was full of rents and holes, which he patched up with humanist rhetoric, rule-of-thumb decisions, and security decrees. It is only in our own time that Stalinism has been given its true, rigorous and totally coherent theoretical expressions. This is the Althusserian orrery.

I do not wish to be ungenerous to a 'post-Stalinist generation', but it is necessary to be plain. Theoretical practitioners are familiar with a central concept of Marx: that a given productive system not only produces commodities, it also reproduces itself, its productive relations and its ideological forms and legitimations. These, in their turn, become a necessary condition for the process of reproduction. Stalinism as ideology has continued to reproduce itself long after the particular historical moment of high Stalinism has passed. And so long as it does so in theory, it will tend to reproduce itself in fact – not in exactly the same form, of course, but in a form sufficiently uncomfortable for its human objects, and even for some of the intellectuals who serve as its priests. So far from being a 'post-Stalinist generation', the Althusserians, and those who share their premises and idealist modes, are working hard, every day, on the theoretical production-line of Stalinist ideology. In terms of theory, they are the Stalinists. They are the carriers of those 'reasons' of irrationality and inhumanity against which we drew up the agenda of 1956 . . .

But this is passion over-near ourselves,
Reality too close and too intense,
And mingled up with something, in my mind,
Of scorn and condemnation personal . . .

And the patient, 'post-Stalinist' reader, who has followed me this far, will still have other questions on his mind: 'Well? And did you people, with your "agenda", correctly identify the theoretical sources of Stalinism? What came of it all? Did you

construct a better Theory?'

I will answer these questions. And conclude.

xiv

First, let us return from the vulgar sociology of ideas to theory and its pure discourse of the truth. Let us revisit the orrery for a last time. Let us not only admire its parts but also notice the parts with which it is *not* supplied.

Althusser's eviction of 'humanism' and 'moralism', in *For Marx*, was somewhat brutal. So he returned to the theme, with renewed sophistication, in *Reading Capital*. The 'real' world, the gross manifestations of the 'obvious', the unpurified concepts of Generalities I, these epiphenomena would lead us (unless guided by Theory) into a world of *maya*, illusion. The text of history (we remember) is 'the inaudible and illegible notation of the effects of a structure of structures.' (R.C. 17) Beneath all, we will find *La Structure à Dominante*. The theory of *Capital* is 'the theory of a mode of production.' And 'what Marx studies in *Capital* is the mechanism which makes the result of a history's production exist *as a society*', hence 'producing the "*society effect*" which makes this result exist *as a society* . . .' (R.S. 65):

We are beginning to suspect, even if it is only because of the works of contemporary ethnology and history, that this *society effect* differs with different modes of production.

Moreover, this society effect is made up of other, lesser effects: 'the knowledge effect for theoretical practice, the aesthetic effect for aesthetic practice, the ethical effect for ethical practice, etc.' 'The search for each of these specific "effects" demands the elucidation of the *mechanism* that produces it . . .' (R.C. 66) This 'mechanism' will be found within the structure of the mode of production. On two occasions, on these two crucial pages, Althusser proudly flourishes what he supposes to be his licence of authority – that sentence from *The Poverty of Philosophy* which we have found out to be in fact a court order

to put his dog down.

Thus society, social formations, are *effects* of the structure of a mode of production. *Capital* also enables us to understand the particles of which this structure is composed:

It defines for the capitalist mode of production the different forms of individuality required and produced by that mode according to functions, of which the individuals are 'supports' (*Träger*), in the division of labour, in the different 'levels' of the structure. Of course, even here, the mode of historical existence of individuality in a given mode of production is not legible to the naked eye in 'history'; its concept, too, must therefore be *constructed*, and like every concept it contains a number of surprises, the most striking of which is the fact that it is nothing like the false obviousness of the 'given' – which is merely the mask of current ideology.' (R.C. 112)

Even if we allow ourselves to suppose, for a moment, that we are offered here an astounding insight, which de-mystifies 'the false obviousness of the "given" and takes us directly to essential truths illegible to the 'naked eye in "history", it is difficult to know how our devastating insight can be, as it were, 'spoken.' Let us suppose that, at a certain conjuncture, there is a moment within the society effect which 'gives' itself to 'history's' naked eye with the false obviousness of a shop steward saying to his fellow-workers: 'Hey, lads! The production manager is coming to the canteen today to give us a pep talk on measured day work. Let's give him a hot reception!' In order to de-mystify these sentences, and *construct* them, within theory, as rigorous concepts, we must verbalise them thus: 'O *träger* of proletarian productive relations! The *träger* allotted a dominant function within bourgeois productive relations will manifest itself in the 'canteen' at this overdetermined conjuncture through the mechanism of a relatively autonomous ethical effect determined in the last instance by the law of motion of capitalist production relations at the level of the intensified extraction of surplus-value from the labour-power of the proletarian *träger*. It is determined that this conjuncture shall manifest itself in the form of a "hot" contradiction!'

It will be seen that we have successfully reduced the shop-steward's ideology to science, with the exception of two words. 'Canteen' is irredeemably polluted with the obviousness of 'fact', and 'hot' is an irreducibly moralistic invasion, so that these words must be contained within inverted commas lest they should contaminate the adjacent scientificity of the text. It will also be seen that de-mystification has necessitated the use of 84 words in place of 27. This is, very generally, the case. But it is a small inconvenience to accompany the attainment of revolutionary rigour. No doubt at all, de-mystification of such devastating clarity, if practised within the heart of the productive structures as a political praxis (philosophy as class struggle) will detonate the whole capitalist order. I cannot understand why the Althusserians are waiting. Why don't they hurry down to Dagenham or Longbridge and try?

But no reports of such praxis have yet come back to me. And for this there must be some theoretical reason. And an even more rigorous post-Althusserian – let us say, a Hindessian-Hirstian – will detect this by a scrupulous symptomatic reading of Althusser's decidedly-not-innocent 'text'. For, under this scrutiny, the shop steward – and indeed the whole sentence – can be exposed as a pseudo-problem, as an abjectly ideological intrusion. This is given away in the very first word, the vocative, 'O'. For this is to smuggle back into theory both historicism and moralism, by allowing us to suppose that the workers are subjects, that they can 'intervene' as 'men' in 'history'. But the situation alluded to in these sentences is in fact a society effect of contradiction within the mode of production. This effect is already inscribed within productive relations and requires no imaginary interpellation of vocatives and subjects. We may relax in our chairs. We may even doze, since contradiction will continue to manifest its effects as shop stewards. There is no need to go down to Dagenham after all.

This has been a vulgar, even empiricist, response. Let us resume our exposition. Humanism, Althusser argues, is the heresy which introduces 'men' as agents or subjects in their own history by an 'underhand reduction', 'by treating the *relations of*

production as mere human relations.' (R.C. 139)

History then becomes the transformation of a human nature, which remains the real subject of the history which transforms it. As a result, history has been introduced into human nature, making men the contemporaries of the historical effects whose subjects they are, but – and this is absolutely decisive – the relations of production, political and ideological social relations, have been reduced to historicized '*human relations*', i.e. to inter-human, inter-subjective relations. This is the favourite terrain of historicist humanism. (R.C. 140)

Althusser entertains for anthropology a malice even fiercer than that which he entertains for 'history'.¹⁴³ The notion of man making his own nature is one which 'a horde of cultural anthropologists have adopted.' (R.C. 140) Even Marx is convicted of relapsing from time to time into a 'latent anthropology', a "naïve" anthropology given in the hidden assumptions of Political Economy. Balibar is honest enough to allow that, again and again, Marx and Engels afford support for 'the idea that *it is men who make history on the basis of previous conditions.*' But who are these "men"? 'The concept of "men" . . . constitutes a real point where the utterance *slips away* towards the regions of philosophical or commonplace ideology.' 'The "obviousness", the "transparency" of the word "men" (here charged with every carnal opacity) and its anodyne appearance are the most dangerous of the traps I am trying to avoid. I shall not be satisfied until I have . . . *eliminated* it as a foreign body . . .' (R.C. 207–8)

One trouble with this mode of theoretical practice is that an untutored and protestant mind keeps 'slipping away' into wholly irrelevant reflections. For example, at 'carnal opacity' I fall into a reverie, and wonder whether M. Balibar also came to intellectual maturation within the Jeunes Étudiants Catholiques? And then, by random association, I recall that Stalin served his own intellectual apprenticeship in a seminary of the Greek Orthodox priesthood . . . And then, since I am a fussy stylist, I wonder whether '*eliminated* as a foreign body' might not be improved, when we consider the 'anodyne' concept of 'men', by

the verb, '*to liquidate*'? For, if we think about persons in a certain way, it becomes more easy to enact our thoughts. If we think about women as 'dolls' or 'pieces' or 'chicks' or whatever, it may be more easy to behave to them in this way. (Some women may even think themselves so.) If we think about men as the *träger* of structures – or of their actions as 'unjustified disturbance systems' – then the thought will guide the act. As those lofty theoretical practitioners, the *daleks*, used to say, when confronted by 'men': '*Exterminate!*'

This reminds me once again of anthropology. For Althusser became involved, for a moment, in chapter seven of Reading Capital, in an interesting argument. He stood back and confronted (as I have earlier done (p.80)) Political Economy as an object, as a structure. And he found, as I think correctly, that Political Economy is based upon a prior definition and delimitation of a given field of activities. But to generalise from these activities, and to assert claims for itself as a universal or fundamental science of society, there must be, within Political Economy, an ulterior assumption; and this can be located in the concept of 'need'. For 'need' is what I have called a 'junction-concept', in this case between economics and anthropology. (It will be seen that I am not following Althusser's words, but clarifying them and putting them into some order.) He then discovers that classical economics is founded on the presupposition of 'a "naïve" anthropology which founds all the acts involved in the production, distribution, reception and consumption of economic objects on the economic subjects and their needs.' (R.C. 162) Thus 'need' is defined in such a way (self-interest) that its conclusions are entailed in its premises. All basic human needs are economic ones, as defined by Political Economy; therefore Political Economy is the basic science of society.

What then would seem to follow? It might seem that Marx, in shattering bourgeois Political Economy, would liberate anthropology – or at least provide a precondition for its liberation, in freeing 'need' from definitions imposed by bourgeois and utilitarian convenience, and permitting anthropology to investigate

'need's' larger resonance. But not at all! As we enter chapter eight, we find that the 'theoretical pretensions', not of bourgeois Political Economy, but of *anthropology* 'have been shattered by Marx's analysis.' (R.C. 166) Marx is now offered to us as a *dalek*, rushing down upon anthropology, and crying out: 'Exterminate!' But if we exterminate the very presupposition upon which Political Economy is founded – if we take away from economics its support in 'need' – then it would seem to rest on a vacancy. Did Marx find a better concept of need, a better anthropological basis? Not at all: 'an anthropological basis becomes therefore purely mythical.' (R.C. 167) Needs are not economic, they are *defined* by the economic, they are 'subject to a double *structural* . . . determination.' Needs are *assigned* their content and meaning by 'the structure of the relations between the productive forces and the relations of production.' (R.C. 167) They are not only assigned their content, but also their meaning *as economic*. For to be *economic* is not to be 'economic' in a vulgar, 'common-sense' way of being concerned with 'economic' needs. It means occupying a certain space, a certain function, to which *La Structure à Dominante* assigns a meaning, according to the modulation and flux of her mode of production. 'To construct the concept of the economic is to define it rigorously as a level, instance or region of the structure of a mode of production.' (R.C. 178)

The economic cannot have the qualities of a *given* (of the immediately visible and observable, etc.) because its identification requires the concept of the structure of the mode of production . . . because its identification therefore presupposes the construction of its *concept*. The concept of the economic must be constructed *for each mode of production* . . . (R.C. 183)

This manoeuvre solves (or should we say dissolves?) a number of difficult problems which have bothered historians and anthropologists for decades into a single wet theoretical pabulum. Kinship in primitive societies is the 'level, instance or region' to which the structure has assigned the 'economic'; military and political dominance is the economic 'instance' in

feudal society. And so on. 'Need' in one case may appear as the need for seven wives and in another case as the need to behead a traitor to his oath of fealty, but both are 'economic', and we certainly have no need of any anthropology to decipher either. Moreover, what could be more abject than the ideological illusion that men and women might participate subjectively, at any 'level' whatsoever, in the definition of need? For they are *träger* – supports of structures within which needs are assigned.

I am becoming tired, and my mind has slipped off once again. For all that Althusser has done, in exterminating anthropology, is to throw 'need' back upon the bosom of *La Structure à Dominante*, so that not one part or 'region' of her 'totality' but her whole person is subjected to the gross utilitarian embraces of the 'economic.' And I recall a critique of the utilitarian concept of 'need', presented at the annunciation of the capitalist mentality, in the words of one great proto-Marxist, King Lear:

O, reason not the need: our basest beggars
Are in the poorest things superfluous:
Allow not nature more than nature needs,
Man's life is cheap as beast's . . .

But for true need –

You heavens, give me that patience, patience I need!

Patience is, very certainly, our first 'need' if we are to reason with Althusser.

I will be patient, but for a last time. I will look once more at the concept of *träger*, I will argue it through, and then this scrutiny of the orrery is done. The fullest statement is thus:

The structure of the relations of production determines the *places* and *functions* occupied and adopted by the agents of production, who are never anything more than the occupants of these places, insofar as they are the "supports" (*Träger*) of these functions. The true 'subjects' (in the sense of constitutive subjects of the process) are therefore not these occupants or functionaries, are not, despite all appearances, the 'obviousness' of the 'given' of naive anthropology, 'concrete individuals', 'real men' – but *the definition and distribution of these places and functions*. The true "subjects" are these definers and distributors: the

relations of production (and political and ideological relations). But since these are "relations", they cannot be thought within the category *subject*. (R.C. 180)

The errors with which this argument is littered are so elementary that we need only indicate them one by one. First, there is the confusion of the notion of structure with structuralism. Structures (social, economic, conceptual) are not a discovery of the last two decades, with a lonely forerunner in Karl Marx. As soon as we talk about 'organisation' (or 'organism'), about 'system', about the 'laws' of supply and demand, or about 'institutions' (and about 'functionaries'), we are talking about structure: and we are likely also to be talking about the ways in which human behaviour is ruled, shaped, ordered, limited and determined. This notion, and the theoretical and empirical exploration of these structures, have been with us for many generations. So far from being a revolutionary notion, it has been quite often – when pursued by practitioners to the ultimate of theoretical 'rigour' – a profoundly conservative one, since it tends to see men and women as fixed in 'stations', on ladders of 'rank', subject to 'laws' (of Smith or of Malthus), allocated 'roles', or as moments of conformity or deviance within an ulterior consensus.

This is in no sense to argue that the notion is untrue or reactionary in itself, although when pushed illegitimately from structure to structuralism it always is both. It is simply a reminder that Althusser here, as elsewhere, is simply reproducing in 'Marxist' terminology notions long sanctified within orthodox ('bourgeois') disciplines. Although some of his followers do not yet seem to have found this out,¹⁴⁴ the notion of men as *träger*, or carriers of functions allocated to them by the market – 'laws' or supply and demand which were even moralised as 'divine' – was at the very heart of vulgarised bourgeois Political Economy. During Marx's lifetime this ideology sought exactly to *impose* this structure upon the working class, and, at the same time, to convince them that they were powerless to resist these 'immutable' laws; and much of the

history of the British working class, in these decades, can only be understood as a heroic (even 'moralistic') *refusal* to be reduced to being supports of the reasons and necessities of capital. When Marx refers, at one point, to the labourer as 'the bearer of living labour' it is in the context of exactly such a discussion of the alienation of 'the productive powers of social labour' as the property of a stranger, and as subject to the (anti-humanist) requirements of capitalist production: 'It is entirely different in the factories owned by the labourers themselves, for instance, in Rochdale.'¹⁴⁵ When Marx, in his well-known comment in the first Preface to *Capital*, disclaimed making any judgement on individual capitalists, it was because from 'my stand-point, from which the *economic formation* of society is *viewed* as a process of natural history' individuals could be seen, not as malevolent and responsible agents, but as 'the personifications of economic categories, embodiments of particular class-relations and class-interests.' But this was to view persons as they appear 'in the domain of Political Economy'.¹⁴⁶ i.e. as they were continually being '*viewed*' within orthodox apologetics of the age. So that Marx was writing, with his tongue firmly in his cheek, and striking a pre-emptive blow against his critics by borrowing the rhetoric closest to the hearts of every exploiter who could exonerate himself as being the *träger* of economic 'laws'.

Thus, as always with Althusser, we are offered an ideological penny, greasy with bourgeois use, and told it is Marxist gold. That penny's twin is still being passed every day in Parsonian and structuralist-functional systems: behind Althusser's '*definition and distribution of . . . places and functions*', with all its italicised 'rigour', we find the Smelserian 'social system',¹⁴⁷ behind *träger* we find 'roles', and behind Althusser's grotesque notion of ideological 'interpellation' or 'hailing' we find even more *chic* notions of men and women (*except*, of course, select intellectuals) not thinking or acting, but being *thought* and being *performed*.¹⁴⁸ All these exalted thinkers, 'bourgeois' or 'Marxist', proceed from the same 'latent anthropology', the same ulterior assumption about 'Man' – that all men and women (*except*

themselves) *are bloody silly*.

Second, there are two trivial and furtive sleights of hand in Althusser's argument which could only deceive an audience hand-picked from the *lumpen-intelligentsia*.¹⁴⁹ a) Althusser tried to take out another licence of authority by gesturing at Marx's theoretical rupture with Feuerbachian 'Man', the 'human essence.' Of course, as any first-year student finds out, in rejecting abstracted and generic 'Man', Marx rediscovered men and women, within 'the ensemble of social relations', within societies structured in class ways, and within 'empirically observable' conditions.¹⁵⁰ As a matter of fact, it is a question, and a very difficult one, how far Marx and Engels ever did fully reject the concept, 'man', which reappears in the concept of alienation, in the notion of a 'truly human morality', and in what some scholars detect as an historical teleology of human immanence. I mention this question, which I cannot turn aside for now and which has been exhaustively discussed by others, only to note that Althusser blocks and dismisses (as lapses, immaturities surviving after the 'epistemological break') theoretical problems manifestly present in Marx's writing, which other critics have found to be either fertile or severely disabling.¹⁵¹ My immediate concern is only to notice that Marx and Engels, in their major investigations, dislodged the concept, 'man', in order to return to empirically-observable *real men*.

b) The other sleight of hand is the same trick performed backwards. 'Humanists' – and all 'anthropologists' – return to the concept, 'man', 'by treating the *relations of production* as mere *human relations*', i.e. reducing these to 'historicized' relations, 'to inter-human, inter-subjective relations.' This trick could only be passed upon an audience innocent of all knowledge of both history and anthropology, and it is disturbing that a 'practice' of this kind could attain to academic reputability. I am by no means endorsing all sociology, all historiography, nor all that has been produced by the 'horde of cultural anthropologists.' In fact, some practitioners within these disciplines are reducing men and women to *träger* of structures as happily as Althusser. But scarcely a soul among them will be

found to be commencing with the proposition of a 'human essence' nor making their object of study 'individual men', in 'inter-subjective relations', as against 'society.' Their objects of study may include kinship systems, inheritance practices, demographic norms, value-systems, social structures, political institutions, class relations, ideological forms, symbolic modes, consensual rules. The 'social sciences' today are the products of a methodological revolution, one of whose initiators was Marx. It is precisely their structural preoccupations which place their feet upon the *glissade* which leads to structuralism, and which prepare their novices for Althusser's embrace.

The third elementary error is to confuse the findings of particular analytical disciplines with the 'truth' about the total phenomenon from which the procedures of that discipline have selected only relevant evidences. I have argued this already, and with particular reference to Political Economy (pp. 80–81); this discipline defines its own field of enquiry, and selects its evidence in accordance with these definitions, and its findings are relevant within the terms of this discipline. Everyone knows this; we do not turn to Ricardo for an explanation of Socinianism. In a certain kinship system, a wife's brother's second cousin may be understood (within the discipline of anthropology) as a certain point within a structured set of relations, and this as (metaphorically) a 'bearer' (*träger*) of those relations; and in exactly the same way, a capitalist may be 'viewed' as a 'bearer' of capitalist productive relations.¹⁵² The discipline has already decided that we define this person so. That this second cousin or this capitalist may be defined quite differently within other disciplines, may be viewed (by a wife or by his own workers) in quite different lights, does not – or *need* not – invalidate the findings in question.

Theoretical practitioners are often to be observed, in small intense groups, interrogating categories. But, because of their empirical blockages, they are incapable of interrogating the point (in society or history) where these categories intersect. Instead of interrogating a category, we will interrogate a woman. It will at least be more agreeable. We will suppose this woman to

be the 'wife' of one man, the 'mistress' of another man, the 'mother' of three children of school age. She is a clothing worker and 'shop steward', she is 'treasurer' of her local Labour Party, and on Thursday evenings she is a 'second violin' in an amateur orchestra. She has a strong constitution (as she must have) but she had a mildly neurotic depressive disposition. She is also (I nearly forgot) a member of the Church of England, and an occasional 'communicant.'

As you will see, she is kept very busy. Viewed in a certain light, she is a point at which a number of 'structures' intersect. When these get on top of her, her depression sometimes takes the form of staying in bed, so that she cannot fulfil her other roles. The psychiatrist sees her as being determined in her behaviour by a structured neurosis. But she is not 'over-determined', her constitution (material basis) is sound, and she soon bounces back. As a 'wife' she is seen by a sociologist as being within 'the institution' of marriage, and performs the 'roles' of housewife and of mother; she is indeed the carrier of these roles. According to his variant of sociological theory, he will try to construe her behaviour as a mistress; he has difficulty in deciding whether to list it within the category 'deviance' or whether to exclude it from the computer-programme as irrelevant. For the woman herself, one part of this 'role' (the sexual act) is objectively much the same with husband or lover; what defines the difference is nothing in the act (well, perhaps a little in that) but the expectations and rules which the society imposes upon her. She ought to be a better carrier of these expectations, and the parson (who has heard about her affair) is censorious.

Meanwhile, the local branch of the Labour Party, of which she is a 'functionary', gets into debt. Her husband keeps making scenes, and her lover is becoming bored. And at work, where she is a *träger* of proletarian productive relations, the boss (the *träger* etc., etc.,) decides to screw down piece-rates. She gets headaches, and stops playing in the orchestra. Beset with the contradictory exhortations of psychiatrist, priest, husband, lover, society, conductor, boss, fellow workers, party officials, all

of whom see her as a carrier of this and that, as well as the shopping, she goes back to bed. In bed she reads an article by a demographer, which shows the number of her children diverges from the norm, and one by an ecologist which shows that three children are too many. Her depression deepens. . .

We will leave her in this sad state in order to note that none of the disciplines or categories have done her any wrong. The demographer has correctly described her deviation from the norm, and he has not the least interest in her lover, even if she should conceive by him, since the question of paternity is irrelevant to this norm. The party official who is seeking to collect the branch dues is not in the least concerned with her household affairs; he sees her, correctly, as an inefficient functionary. She is in no sense the subject of the expectations and sexual norms of 'society' or of the Church, she is the object of their scrutiny. And at work, she may certainly be seen as the carrier of productive relations. But not one of these definitions affect the fact that she remains a woman. Is the woman then no more than a point at which all these relations, structures, roles, expectations, norms and functions *intersect*; is she the carrier of all of them, simultaneously, and is she *acted* by them, and absolutely determined at their intersection? It is not by any means an easy question, for many of these roles are not only imposed, they are internalised, and they have gathered up like a knot inside her head. To answer this question we would have to *observe her history*.

I don't know how her history eventuates. I have two alternative scripts. One of them is obvious. She is carried off to a mental home, after a suicide attempt, and kept going on valium. In the other, she goes back to work, because, *in the last instance*, the mortgage has to be paid and the children fed. At work things are blowing up to a crisis. A militant workmate (this bit is unlikely) gives her Althusser to read. She turns the pages. Enlightenment breaks through. She shouts out: 'I'm not a bloody THING!' She throws the book at the foreman. She calls out the workshop on strike. She leaves her husband and she sacks her lover. She joins the women's movement. She leaves the

Church of England. She rejoins the orchestra, and greatly enjoys performing within that structure, a process with fifty subjects determined by conductor and score. But, alas! She fancies the conductor, and all her muddles are, once again, about to begin . . .

As it happens, I do not know this woman, though I have known several like her, who have been good comrades, and men like her as well. I have introduced her only as the 'bearer' (*Träger*) of an analogy. The analogy may not be pressed too far, because the procedures required to observe the behaviour of an individual are not the same as those required to observe historical eventuation. We cannot construct our historical or economic knowledge by first positing 'individuals' as isolates. But the analogy will serve if it reminds us that, in the people we observe and know, we find intersecting determinations, which they are always trying to handle and reconcile; that 'over-determination' can manifest itself as illness or immobility; that it is legitimate to view a person as a carrier of structures, but that we can arrive at that person only through a sum of many views; that whatever we conclude, in the endlessly receding argument of pre-determination and free will – for our friend may have been determined by her protestant upbringing to cry out, 'I am not a bloody THING!' – it is profoundly important that our protestant prejudice should be renewed, that we should *think* ourselves to be 'free' (which Althusser will not allow us to think); and that, finally, neither a person nor a society may be viewed as a sum of intersecting determinations, but can be known only in observation over time.

We may offer another analogy, which evades the difficulties of positing an 'individual'. We are familiar with analogies drawn from the rules of a game. Any complex game is unintelligible until we understand the rules. People appear to run around, to start and stop, in arbitrary and confused ways. A careful observer (who already has some notion of games) can infer the rules; once this has been done, everything becomes clear, and continued observation will confirm or refine the rules which he has inferred. The anthropologist or historian is in much the

same position as the observer. Societies (and a 'society' itself is a concept describing people within an imaginary boundary and actuated by common rules) may be seen as very complex 'games', which sometimes afford very material evidences as to their character (the pitch, the goals, the teams), sometimes are governed by visible rules (rule-books of law and constitution), and are sometimes governed by invisible rules, which the players know so deeply that they are never spoken, and which must be inferred by the observer. For example, the players rarely kill the referee.

The whole of life goes forward within 'structures' of such visible and invisible rules, which prohibit this action and assign a special symbolic significance to that. Marx's most extraordinary accomplishment was to infer – 'read' – 'de-code' – the only-partly visible structure of rules by which human relations were mediated by money: capital. He often glimpsed, sometimes grasped, other invisible rules which we, after one hundred years, are – or ought to be – able to read more plainly. There were other, and significant, symbolic and normative rules which (in my view) he overlooked. Some of these were not within the view of his contemporary knowledge, and for such rules Political Economy had no terms.

When the rules of a game have been read or inferred, we can then assign to each player his role or function in the game. He is (in terms of those rules) the game's carrier, an element within its structure – a half-back or a goal-keeper. In exactly this sense we can say that a 'worker' is the bearer of productive relations; indeed, we have already defined her in this way when we called her a 'worker' rather than a 'second violin'. But we must take the analogy further. For we do not go on to say that the goal-keeper is *being gamed* or the capitalist is *being capitaled*. This is what Althusser, and, also, some structuralist anthropologists and sociologists, would wish us to say. Althusser offers us a pseudo-choice: either we must say that there are no rules but only a swarm of 'individuals', or we must say that the rules *game* the players.

The difference between 'playing' a game and being gamed

illustrates the difference between rule-governed structuration of historical eventuation (within which men and women remain as subjects of their own history) and structuralism. As always, Althusser has simply taken over a reigning fashion of bourgeois ideology and named it 'Marxism'. In the old days, vulgar Political Economy saw men's economic behaviour as being *lawed* (although workers were obtuse and refractory in obeying these laws), but allowed to the autonomous individual an area of freedom, in his intellectual, aesthetic or moral choices. Today, structuralisms engross this area from every side; we are *structured* by social relations, *spoken* by pre-given linguistic structures, *thought* by ideologies, *dreamed* by myths, *gendered* by patriarchal sexual norms, *bonded* by affective obligations, cultured by mentalités, and acted by history's script. None of these ideas is, in origin, absurd, and some rest upon substantial additions to knowledge. But all slip, at a certain point, from sense to absurdity, and, in their sum, all arrive at a common terminus of unfreedom. Structuralism (this terminus of the absurd) is the ultimate product of self-alienated reason – 'reflecting' the common-sense of the times – in which all human projects, endeavours, institutions, and even culture itself, appear to stand *outside* of men, to stand *against* men, as objective things, as the 'Other' which, in its own turn, moves men around as things. In the old days, the Other was then named 'God' or Fate. Today it has been christened anew as Structure.

I have said that Marx made visible the 'rules' of capital. To do this, it was necessary to proceed by way of a 'Critique of Political Economy.' In this way he was able to construct the concept of a capitalist 'mode' of production, both as the circuit of capital and as a mode of self-reproduction, by which capital reproduced the productive relations which enabled its own reproduction. This mode of production could then be conceptualised as an integral structure, in which all relations must be taken together as one set, and in which each rule is assigned its definition within that totality. From this he adduced (although sometimes wrongly) the forms of development through such a mode might pass, and, further (and more rashly) he projected

its 'law of motion' into the future. That these 'laws' or 'tendencies' did not (as he once truculently asserted) work 'with iron necessity towards inevitable results' may be explained, in part, by the fact that he understated the countervailing tendencies at work. Contrary to the view of some theoretical practitioners, no worker known to historians ever had surplus-value taken out of his hide without finding some way of fighting back (there are plenty of ways of going slow); and, paradoxically, by his fighting back the tendencies were diverted and the 'forms of development' were themselves developed in unexpected ways. In another part, this was due to the fact that other countervailing tendencies arrived unbidden out of 'regions' for which Political Economy had no terms.

But these reservations do not in any way go to show that Marx's project was not legitimate. It was an epoch-making advance in knowledge to construct, by arduous theoretical engagement, by hypothesis and by equally arduous empirical investigation, the concept of a structured mode of production in this way.

'Aha!', I am asked: 'Is this not to give back to Althusser with my left hand all that I have taken away with my right? And is not Althusser licensed to envisage capitalism as structure?' The answer is 'no'. And whoever asked that question may go to the back of the class. A capitalist mode of production is not capitalism. We pass on the exchange of one letter from the adjectival characterisation of a mode of production (a concept within Political Economy, albeit within Marxist 'anti' Political Economy) to a noun descriptive of a social formation in the totality of its relations. We will leave our interrogator on the back bench for a few pages, to meditate upon his folly, and return to the mode of production.

After all the rancour of my previous critique, this should at last be the occasion for a happy reunion. For historians within the Marxist tradition have for many decades employed the concept of a mode of production, have examined the labour process and the relations of production. I can recall a time, in this country, when there were not many of us, when this was our

distinctive preoccupation, and one which was decidedly disreputable. And now – not only among Althusserians, but among theoretical practitioners very generally – the ‘mode of production’ has become the focus of a truly obsessional preoccupation. This, decidedly, is their ‘thing’. They are always undoing it and doing it up again. They are always examining its ‘mechanism’; rearranging its components; inserting a new pinion here, a balance-wheel there, and oiling the moving parts with purified abstractions. The ‘mode of production’ has become like a base camp in the Arctic of Theory, which the explorers may not depart from for more than a hundred yards for fear of being lost in an ideological blizzard.

What is odd about this ‘mode of production’ is that it can be constructed and reconstructed with Theory without any recourse to the knowledge of historians, anthropologists and others. Althusser and Balibar are too rigorous even to acknowledge the findings of these disciplines; Hindess and Hirst show a casual acquaintance with some secondary work, and employ themselves in demonstrating that this work (being ideological in origin) is unnecessary to Theory; and historians repay these tributes, not with anger, but with boredom. They do not reply, or argue, simply because the whole project of theoretical practice is idealist and irrelevant. For theoretical practice engenders these modes of production, not within theory or society, but within metaphysics; and a metaphysical mode of production, in its turn, will produce, not commodities, but metaphysical concepts and categories, while at the same time reproducing endlessly its own conditions for metaphysical self-reproduction. Like all cooks of the Absolute, these practitioners have found the instant theoretical recipe, the handful of wholesome ingredients out of which all history and every society is baked.

So that this is not, after all, a place of happy reunion but a place of total disassociation between incompatible methods and traditions. It is as if a conference were to be held, with, on the one hand, all those concerned with sexual relations, gender roles, the forms and history of the family, kinship structures,

child nurture, homosexuality, sexual psychology, the literature of profane and romantic love; and, on the other hand, a party of theoretical practitioners who had reduced all this to the metaphysical contemplation of the reproductive organs, which produce all these ‘manifestations’ and which, at the same time, reproduce themselves. One party would attain to knowledge through the investigation of a multiplicity of evidence in its own authentic expression; the other would be locked into a metaphysical circuit of ovulation and sperm. The participants would be baffled. They would decide to disengage, and continue their proceedings in separate rooms. As theoretical practice and historical materialism have done.

It is not a question of disagreement about this or that, but one of total incompatibility in the way in which a historian and such a ‘theorist’ situates himself before a mode of production. We have authorities on ‘productive relations’ who have never looked inside a feudal tenure, or a bill of exchange, or a woollen Piece Hall, or a struggle around piece-rates; and we have authorities on ‘the labour process’ who have never found relevant to their exalted theory Christopher Hill’s work on ‘the uses of sabbatarianism’, nor mine on ‘time and work-discipline’, nor Eric Hobsbawm’s on ‘the tramping artisan’, nor that of a generation of (American, French, British) ‘labour historians’ (a group often dismissed with scorn¹⁵³) on time-and-motion study, Taylorism, and Fordism.

It is not only that this kind of theoretical idealism is actively unhelpful: that, for example, in the immense area of study recently opened up, the study of peasant societies (in which so much turns on subsistence economy, taxation and marketing, traditional norms and needs, inheritance practices, familial modes, particularist customary law), theoretical practitioners are left fiddling with their model trying to take into account the rural millions who are somehow ‘marginal’ to the proper circuits of capital. It is not only that gross historical materiality stubbornly refuses to ‘correspond’ to the purity of its concept; that, whatever theoretical allowance is made for ‘contradiction’ it is never allowance enough, for in every historical ‘now’

(conjuncture) the circuit of capital is being obstructed and resisted at every point – as men and women refuse to be reduced to its *träger* – so that the ‘forms’ are ‘developed’ and diverted in theoretically improper ways by the class struggle itself. It is also that this idealism is actively misleading and diversionary, giving us false historical results at every turn, imposing its own presuppositions upon the evidence, blockading all the ‘empirical’ canals of the senses of knowledge, and, as contemporary political theory, leading only to bizarre kangaroo strategies (in which conclusions are already pre-empted by the arbitrary premises of this party or that sect) or else to the security of an arm-chair.

But is not this dismissal unfair? Is not theoretical practice, with its ‘relative autonomy’ and its intricate gearing, greatly more subtle and rigorous than the ‘vulgar economism’ which it displaced? The answer, in brief, is that this is a ‘yes-type’ question: to which we must reply ‘no’. It is a ‘yes-type’ question because it reduces to a faceless and unidentifiable caricature all precedent theory and practice, and seeks to erase any evidence as to the vigorous alternative tradition on behalf of which I speak. And the reply must be ‘no’, because, despite all its abstraction and saving clauses, the theoretical product is an idealist reductionism as vulgar in its economism as anything that has gone before.

We will, however, allow a more leisurely answer. And in this we may first offer an apology to Marxist economists. The theory of a mode of production belongs, very properly, within their own conceptual system. It is proper that it should be interrogated and refined. The continuing debates among economists may well be significant, and historians hope to be helped by their findings. More generally, the employment of the concept of a mode of production is an improvement upon a certain slipshod use of the terms ‘material base’ and ‘productive forces’ – or it could be an improvement, in minds open to any empirical conversation. As Williams has noted:

It was not Marxism, but the systems with which it contended and continues to contend, which had separated and abstracted various parts of this whole social process. It was the assertion and explanation of political forms and philosophical and general ideas as independent of, ‘above’, the material social process that produced a necessary kind of counter-assertion. In the flow of polemic this was often overstated, until it came to repeat, in a simple reversal of terms, the kind of error it attacked.

Hence Marxism ‘often took the colouring of a specifically bourgeois and capitalist kind of materialism.’¹⁵⁴ This is certainly true. But, then it is also – and for the same reasons – true that to reduce all social and intellectual phenomena to ‘effects’ of an essentialist, metaphysical ‘mode of production’ – by whatever elaboration of ‘mechanisms’ – is to do no more than enclose that old bourgeois materialism within idealist amber.

There is also, we will allow, a great difference in the quality of theoretical practice. It is possible to practice upon a mode of production badly or well. Balibar practices so badly that he allows no purchase for a historian’s interrogation. But Simon Clarke, practising on Althusser and Balibar, is able to illuminate their inconsistencies and absurdities in the clearest ways, and hence to emerge, by way of critique, with a lucid restatement of the concept of a mode of production. I find this helpful, and, at the same time, I am relieved of the labour of going over the same task. Clarke has evidently come to the very verge of the kangaroo reserve. But he is not yet quite over that verge. For he is able, when discussing ‘different forms of society’, to write:

The relations of production on which these various modes of production are based will provide the basis for difference forms of exploitation, and correspondingly different relations of distribution. They will also be expressed in specific economic, ideological and political forms, which must be analysed as *developed* forms of the fundamental relation of production.¹⁵⁵

This is the same kind of circular act which we noted in Smelser, where the snake ate its own tail; instead of a ‘value-system’, the ‘fundamental relation of production’ is swallowing its own

effects. And the critical problem lies in the last few lines – 'economic, ideological and political forms . . . must be analysed as *developed* forms of the fundamental relation of production.' The essentialist notion of 'immanence', the ultimate platonism, lies there.

Should we return to Marx? Or should we argue the point, independent of any authority? Let us try to do both together. It is certainly true – and it is generally held to be a fundamental 'Marxist' proposition – that there is some correspondence between a given mode of production and a social formation (including political and ideological forms). This is hardly surprising, since production, social relations, political modes, and ideological constructions are all human activities. The Marxist proposition goes further, and asserts not only 'some correspondence', but a correspondence in which the mode of production is determinate. Marx and Engels expressed this correspondence and this determination in a number of different ways; by the elaborate (but, ultimately, mechanical and unsatisfactory) spatial analogy of 'basis' and 'superstructure'; by means of blunt propositions, such as 'social being determines social consciousness' (itself a polemical 'counter-assertion' of the kind indicated by Williams); by enigmatic but suggestive analogies from natural science ('a general illumination in which all other colours are plunged'); and by swift metaphorical gestures – the hand-mill '*gives you* society with the feudal lord', religious ideologies are a '*reflection*' of productive relations, which '*appear as*' categories within Political Economy, and these relations reveal 'that the innermost secret, the hidden basis of the entire social structure, and . . . the corresponding specific form of the State.'¹⁵⁶ When we recall that some reciprocal interaction is also proposed (e.g. as between 'superstructure' and 'basis') there is 'play' enough in these propositions to allow for many adjustments and interpretations.

Presented with these indecisive propositions, the practitioner who works within a 'Marxist' tradition might take one or two courses. He might decide to select among them for the 'correct' and 'scientific' formulation; screw it down more tightly; tinker

with the 'mechanism'; eliminate all 'play'; theorise about the 'society effect' and the 'ideological effect'; and perfect an orrery. I suppose that one may condone this course in a certain kind of philosopher or theologian, who has never engaged in the difficult labour of reconstituting from historical materials an actualised mode of production, who does not understand the historian's necessary recourse to analogies and metaphorical suggestions as an indication of the connections and direction of the social process, and mistakes these for literal statements as to some 'mechanism.' He has never heard a stick break in the forest as a commoner disputes his rights with the King, nor listened to the anguished silence and then the hysterical saturnalia as a heretic is burned. He thinks it can all be plotted in a map in his head: this basis, that terrain, this region, level and instance. In the end he thinks that his thinking makes it so: 'the process that produces the concrete-knowledge takes place wholly in the theoretical practice.'*(EM. 186)*

There is, however, another possible course. We may commence with these various propositions as hypotheses, and then we may *find out*. This will lead us at once into a very different set of questions. Are these propositions true? Did Marx show them to be true, or did he assume them without further testing? If they are true, are they significant and suggestive, or are they truisms which still leave everything to be found out? And, again, if they are true, *why* are they true? In what ways, and through which means, does this correspondence assert itself? And, finally, does our new knowledge (gained in response to such questions) enable us to return again to Marx, not to adjust and tighten up one formulation, but to modify and re-organise his concepts?

The alternative Marxist tradition has been asking these kinds of questions for some decades. I don't hold power of attorney to speak for 'history', so that I can only report my own understanding of historical knowledge. The first question – 'are these propositions true?' – is, alas, an 'empirical' one. In my own view, they *have* been shown to be true, but in terms even more lax, and equivocal, than those of Marx. In diverse historical circum-

stances, research has shown that 'the economic movement finally asserts itself as necessary'; the comparative study of feudal societies, or of industrial revolutions, has demonstrated the ways in which a generic mode of production has found roughly analogous expression within different societies and state institutions; and Marx's most fertile hypothesis (as stated in his well-known letter to Weydemeyer of 1852) that *the existence of classes is only bound up with particular, historic phases in the development of production*, seems to me to have been demonstrated beyond doubt, and with many consequent riders as to analogous forms of class expression within intellectual and social life.

But the findings, while positive, has been equivocal. They suggest not only a greater complexity and reciprocity of relations than Marx proposed, but also they raise the question of what significance we can place upon the correspondence. The complexity, as I have sufficiently argued, is not in the least illuminated by giving to it a reputable new name, like 'relative autonomy' (see p. 132). The critical concept (unexamined by Althusser) is that of 'determination' itself; hence the importance – as Williams and I and others have been insisting for years (and to the deaf) of defining 'determine' in its senses of 'setting limits' and 'exerting pressures' and of defining 'law of motion' as 'logic of process.' This helps us, at once, to break out of the idealist circuit; we can no longer offer social formations as 'society effects' or as 'developed forms' of an immanent mode.

The question as to the significance to be placed upon the correspondence is even more difficult. For the idealist notion commences with the proposition that 'the economic' is (in the last instance, etc.) determining, and then leaps, hand-in-hand with its twin, vulgar 'economism', to the good old utilitarian assumption that it is therefore somehow more 'real' in all ways. Once landed here, theoretical practice can deploy a number of arguments. Thus if, in a given society, the decisive region appears to be non-economic (kinship, military power), then this can simply be re-defined as the area to which the 'economic instance' has been 'assigned' (see p. 197). More commonly,

other areas are simply regarded as being *less* real – as second or third-order problems, as the concern of another 'region' of theory (as yet immature and undeveloped), or simply as non-problems, which may be spirited away with the wand of 'relative autonomy.'

But it is of little consolation to a prisoner, languishing in 1976 in the foetid and overcrowded compound of a Calcutta gaol, to be told that his is a third-order problem, and that he is the victim of a relatively autonomous society effect. Worse than this: the half-hidden assumption, that what is 'relatively autonomous' is therefore less 'real' (and less deserving of theoretical or historical attention) than the mode of production, can afford to the theoretical practitioner, if whim or ideology should strike him, a stupefying laxity in analysis. Indeed, religions, ideologies, and the State itself, with all its armoury of repressive apparatuses, being 'relatively autonomous', may develop, over half-centuries or centuries, *in any way they like*, and the theorists of the 'mode of production', in the security of their self-confirming propositions, need not turn a theoretical hair. For they have already defined this mode as being essential and truly real, and the effects, or regions, or levels, may go on their autonomous way. In exactly this way, in 1963, Althusser waves his wand, and Stalinism (unless as a third-order problem) was made to disappear:

Everything that has been said of the "cult of the personality" refers exactly to the domain of the *superstructure* and therefore of State organisation and ideologies; further it refers largely to *this domain alone*, which we know from Marxist theory possesses a "relative autonomy" (which explains very simply, in theory, how the socialist *infrastructure* has been able to develop without essential damage during this period of errors affecting the superstructure). (F.M. 240)

Very simple. But this arbitrary separation of a 'mode of production' from everything that actually goes on in history (so characteristic of the idealist/economist twin) ends up by telling us nothing and apologising for everything. Such Theory is rather like a doctor who, when his patient is in agony with a

disease, consults for an hour, and then pronounces that, while the disease is determined in the last instance by the body, it is a relatively autonomous body-effect. As indeed it is; the disease is not a projection of the patient's soul; but medicine learned this many centuries ago. And for a long time this spurious dissociation of 'production'/'consciousness' – itself only the old dichotomy matter/mind or body/soul reappearing in Marxist form – has been challenged, in the Marxist tradition, on one side by historians and anthropologists, who have insisted that ideas, norms and rules be replaced *within* the mode of production, without which it could not be carried on for a day;¹⁵⁷ and on the other side by cultural materialists who have insisted that the notion of a 'superstructure' 'was never materialist enough.'¹⁵⁸ 'Determination' is a large, self-important word, which appears to pronounce on each case with finality. But when it has driven away in its Bentley, we are left to discover that everything is still to be found out. To revert to our earlier analogy, there may be a true sense in which a man's neurotic state may be determined in the last instance by his sexual nature, which, in its turn, is determined by his male reproductive organs. But this does not make his neurosis any less 'real', nor are we likely to understand it or cure it by prolonged scrutiny of his penis. And, moreover, to complicate the matter further, one symptom of his neurosis may be precisely, to render him impotent. It is a simplistic analogy, since societies are as complex as persons but in different ways. But these two reservations – as to the complexity of the 'correspondence' and as to its significance – are so severe as to call in question the effectivity of Marx's general notions. Very few of the critically-significant (the most 'real') problems which we confront in our actual lives appear to be *directly* and causally implicated in this field of correspondence: nationalism, racism, sexual repression, Fascism, and Stalinism itself are certainly not removed from this field (for the pressure of class antagonisms and class-based ideologies can be felt in all), but equally certainly they cannot be seen as 'developed forms of the fundamental relation of production'; they are forms in their own right, and for their analysis we require (just as the psychiatrist

requires) a new set of terms, not entailed within the premises of Political Economy.

This is not to say that Marx's propositions were wrong, although they were sometimes expressed so over-confidently that they licensed wrong conclusions. It was important to learn that neurosis was not caused by Satanic possession, and important to learn that human affairs did not express the mind of divine providence, or of great men, or of unfolding Ideas, or of a benevolent class-neutered market. Marx took knowledge across a threshold, pointed her towards the world, and told her to go and *find out*. And in that outer world, beyond the secure 'base' of the mode of production, many of the most cherished of human concerns are sited.

Moreover, this raises in a new way the whole problem of the effectivity of human agency, of men and women as subjects of their own history. Within the secure circuits of a mode of production, it is easy enough for Althusser to envisage men as *träger*, and to relapse into exactly the same mode of thought as that which Marx identified in Proudhon; 'From his point of view man is only the instrument of which the Idea or the eternal reason makes use in order to unfold itself.'¹⁵⁹ But in the world outside that door, it might possibly be shown that agency had larger scope to exercise its effects. To be sure, this agency will not be set free from ulterior determinate pressures nor escape determinate limits. It is unlikely to hasten on the resolution of the extraordinary complexity and contradictions of India's overlapping modes of production. But it might be able to open the gate to the Calcutta gaol and set our prisoner free. Indeed, it has done exactly that. It might even be able to resist or to legitimate the dominant ideological pressures of our time. It might collapse into complicity with Stalinist predestinarianism, or it might reason with Althusser and help to liberate from his influence another mind.

Moreover, if we look towards any future described as 'socialist', there is no error more disabling and actively dangerous to the practice of any human freedom than the notion that there is some 'socialist' mode of production (as

public or State ownership of the means of production) within which some 'socialist' relations or production are *given*, which will afford a categorical guarantee that some immanent socialist society (values, ideas, institutions, etc.) will *unfold itself*: not, perhaps, instantaneously (for there is 'relative autonomy', etc. etc.) but in good time, out of the womb of the mode of production itself. This is wholly untrue: every choice and every institution is still to be made, and to suppose otherwise is to fall into an error as astonishing in its mystical crudity as Althusser's notion that under Stalin the 'socialist *infrastructure*' was able 'to develop without essential damage.' (p. 216) So far from Theory affording to us such comforting guarantees, the appearance, within parties and ideologies which claim themselves to be in the 'vanguard' of socialist endeavour, of metaphysical theologies so monstrous (within which will, choice, value, and men and women themselves disappear) is a most ominous premonition. We must liberate our minds *now*; if that ideology should ever claim a share in power it will be too late.

XV

We may now attempt to bring this argument together. I proposed, in an earlier section, that the hypotheses of historical materialism and the 'anti' Political Economy of *Capital* were, however, closely related, distinct. This was clearly stated by Marx in his preface to the 'Paris Manuscripts' (1844) when he outlined his impossibly ambitious life-project:

I will therefore, present one after another a critique of law, of morality, politics, etc., in different independent brochures and then finally in a separate work try to show the connection of the whole and the relationship of the parts to each other and end with a criticism of the elaboration of the material by speculative philosophy. Therefore, in the present work the connection of the Political Economy with the state, law, morality, civil life, etc. is *only dealt with in so far as Political Economy itself professes to deal with these subjects*.¹⁶⁰

Meanwhile, the hypotheses of historical materialism ('the relationship of the parts to each other') were rapidly presented,

between 1845 and 1848, in *The German Ideology*, *The Poverty of Philosophy*, and *The Communist Manifesto*. Frederick Engels played a major part in the development of these hypotheses and, behind Engels, we find the direct influence of the class organisations and class consciousness of the British working-class movement; as Stedman Jones has shown, in a helpful study, Engels was too modest as to his own part in this joint production,¹⁶¹ and there is thus the greater reason to attend with respect to the *caveats* in his late letters.

Thus the hypotheses of historical materialism were already presented by 1848. These hypotheses Engels resumed in several of his subsequent prefaces to editions of the *Manifesto*. Thus (to the German edition of 1883):

The basic thought running through the *Manifesto* – that economic production and the structure of society of every historical epoch necessarily arising therefrom constitute the foundation for the political and intellectual history of that epoch; that consequently . . . all history has been a history of class struggles . . . this basic thought belongs solely and exclusively to Marx.¹⁶²

These propositions, Engels claimed in his preface to the English edition of 1888, were 'destined to do for history what Darwin's theory has done for biology.' Nevertheless, as we have seen (pp. 90–91), these hypotheses remained largely undeveloped over the next forty years; they were elaborated more by Engels than by Marx, and at the end of his life Engels could clearly see that 'only a little has been done.'

Meanwhile, and for at least twenty years, Marx had turned aside to wrestle with his antagonist, Political Economy, and in this contest to elaborate what I have argued (p. 80) may be seen as itself an 'anti-structure' to that structure. I have argued that Marx was himself, for a time, trapped within the circuits of capital – an immanence manifesting itself in 'forms' – and that he only partly sprung that trap in *Capital*. It is to this trap (the *Grundrisse* face of Marx) that theoretical practice so eagerly returns;¹⁶³ it is from the heart of this trap that Althusser extracts his textual licences of authority, and he wishes to return us to

the conceptual prison (mode of production = social formation) that had been imposed upon Marx by his bourgeois antagonist. How far Marx himself ever became fully aware of his imprisonment is a complex question, and not one which (in my view) is of much importance to the present advance of knowledge. We are interested in advancing history, and the understanding of history, and not in Marxology. But at least we should note, that Marx, in his increasing preoccupation in his last years with anthropology, was resuming the projects of his Paris youth.¹⁶⁴

The problem, as we have sufficiently argued, is to move from the circuits of capital to *capitalism*; from a highly-conceptualised and abstracted mode of production, within which determinism appears as absolute, to historical determinations as the exerting of pressures, as a logic of process within a larger (and sometimes countervailing) process. It would, of course, be ridiculous to suggest that Marx, in *Capital*, did not repeatedly come to the margin between Political Economy and history, structure and process, and repeatedly gesture – often in greatly enlightening ways – as to the pressure of the first upon the forms and logic of the second. But the gestures *remain hypotheses*; they are assumed rather than shown to be so; and, moreover, the assumptions are supported by the prior hypotheses of historical materialism, which long precede *Capital*, but which have been left both undeveloped and unexamined. And the problems arise, repeatedly, at what I have called the ‘junction-concepts’ (p. 149): ‘need’, which may reappear within anthropology as ‘norm’ and within history as ‘wants’ or ‘values’; ‘mode of production’ which may reappear as a determining pressure within a complex historical process; ‘class’, as posited as the structuring of a mode of production, or as eventuating in ways which may never be pre-determined (as historians have sufficiently shown); ‘determination’ itself, as closure or as pressure.

Moreover, Political Economy, including Marx’s ‘anti’ structure, had no terms – had deliberately, and for the purposes of its analytical science, *excluded* the terms – which become, immediately, essential if we are to comprehend societies and histories. Political Economy has terms for use-value, for

exchange-value, for monetary value, and for surplus-value, but not for normative value. It has no terms for other areas of consciousness: how does one do the symbolic rituals of Tyburn or of Lenin’s (or, now, Mao’s) mausoleum into terms of value, price and profit? We may hypothesise that one ‘vocabulary’ will ‘reappear’ within the other, but we still do not know how, by what means or mediations. And it is here that we find that Engels’s analogy between Darwin and Marx was, in one respect, even closer than he intended. For just as Darwin proposed and demonstrated an evolutionary process which proceeded by means of a hypothetical transmutation of the species – species which had hitherto been hypostatized as immutable and fixed – and yet remained wholly in the dark as to the actual genetic means of this transmission and transmutation – so, in an analogous way, historical materialism, as a hypothesis, was left unprovided with its own ‘genetics.’ If a correspondence could be proposed – and, in some part, demonstrated – between a mode of production and historical process, how, and in what ways, did this come about? It is an important question: because one answer will be simply to set aside the problem unanswered. And theology will then say that evolution manifests the peculiar working-out of the divine will, while theoretical practice will then say that history manifests the ‘development of the forms’ of capital. The other answer (the tradition of Mendel, and of historical and cultural materialism) will be to *find out*.

What we have found out (in my view) lies within a missing term: ‘human experience.’ This is, exactly, the term which Althusser and his followers wish to blackguard out of the club of thought under the name of ‘empiricism.’ Men and women also return as subjects, within this term – not as autonomous subjects, ‘free individuals’, but as persons experiencing their determinate productive situations and relationships, as needs and interests and as antagonisms, and then ‘handling’ this experience within their *consciousness* and their *culture* (two other terms excluded by theoretical practice) in the most complex (yes, ‘relatively autonomous’) ways, and then (often but not always through the ensuing structures of class) acting upon their

determinate situation in their turn.

It must be emphasised that, while this is not incompatible with the hypotheses of Engels and Marx, it is not exactly the same as their propositions. For we have introduced one term, 'culture', which in its 'anthropological' derivation, Althusser would deplore, and which in its subsequent definition and elaboration within historical knowledge was not available to Marx. It is a term which I am wholly committed to defend, and to defend, if Marxologists insist that it is necessary, *against* Marx. For it is not true that Marx passed over in innocence the need to provide his theory with some 'genetics'. He attempted such a provision, first, in his writings on alienation, commodity, fetishism, and reification; and, second, in his notion of man, in his history, continuously making over his own nature. (We will only note in passing, since other critics have examined this question, that Althusser excludes all exploration of either set of suggestive notions from this canon). Of the first set of concepts I wish only to say this: they propose to supply a 'genetics' – to explain how history is determined in ways which conflict with the conscious intentions of its subjects – in terms of mystified *rationality*. Men imprison themselves within structures of their own creation because they are *self-mystified*. While historians may find these notions suggestive in certain areas (as in the study of ideologies), they would argue – I certainly will argue – that, in more general application, they are the product of an overly-rational mind; they offer an explanation in terms of mystified rationality for *non-rational* or *irrational* behaviour and belief, whose sources may not be deduced from reason. As to the second set of concepts (man making over his own nature), while they are important and point the right way, they remain so undeveloped that, in effect, they do little more than restate the prior question in new terms: we are still left to *find out* 'how'?

Thus we return to the missing terms, 'experience', and at once we enter into the real silences of Marx. This is not only a point of junction between 'structure' and 'process', but a point of *dis-junction* between alternative and incompatible traditions. For one tradition, that of idealist dogma, these 'silences' are

blanknesses or absences of 'rigour' in Marx (failures fully to theorise his own concepts), and they must be sewn together by bridging concepts, conceptually generated from the same conceptual matrix. But, as we have seen (p. 150), this pursuit of the security of a perfect totalised theory is the original heresy against knowledge. Such perfect idealist creations, each seam superbly joined by invisible conceptual stitching, always end up in the jumble sale. If Marx had really designed a Theory like that, it would be down in the bargain basement already, along with Spencer, Dühring, and Comte, to be snapped up by some graduate student looking for a bizarre patch of material to sew onto her doctoral jeans.

In its present incarnation as 'theoretical practice', this notion of Theory is like a blight that has settled on the mind. The empirical senses are occluded, the moral and aesthetic organs are repressed, the curiosity is sedated, all the 'manifest' evidence of life or of art is distrusted as 'ideology', the theoretical ego enlarges (for everyone else is mystified by 'appearances'), and the devotees gather intensely around the Mode of Production. Like the approaches to the altar of Lakshmi in an ancient Hindu temple, the passages are long, slippery, and ornate, but there at length she is, the goddess of material wealth, encrusted with gold and jewels, roped with garlands, and with nothing visible but her huge enigmatic eyes. They do her obeisance, and incant her several names, *La Structure à Dominante*, The Mode, the CMP. The rites which they perform are sometimes pitiful, sometimes comic. Critics struggle to decode poems as the re-enactment of theory or of ideology in opaque terms. And behind these terms lies The Mode, the CMP. Just as, in the inert platonism of their theory, all culture and all social life has been reduced to the Mode, so their vocabulary is stewed down until it is reduced to the same de-natured glue.

A double-articulation GMP/GI-GI/AI/LMP is, for example, possible, whereby a GI category, when transformed by AI into an ideological component of an LMP, may then enter into conflict with the GMP social relations it exists to reproduce.¹⁶⁵

It is kind of this literary critic to provide us with an 'example'. But to suppose this to advance a 'science' of materialist aesthetics is to calumniate both science and materialism.

Not all the rites are so whole-hearted. The pilgrims are sometimes critical and querulous. But since, in some part of their hearts, they still wish to worship the Absolute, they do not repudiate but seek only to amend the rites. Hence the problems (which they can really see) are reduced to pseudo-problems within a conceptual system designed to repel their solution. Even excellent historians, who ought to know better (and who perhaps do), ponder the lack of a 'precise structural *mechanism*' to 'connect' the base and the superstructure, and meditate on the ways in which this omission can be conceptually repaired.¹⁶⁶ But what is wrong, and was always wrong, is the analogy we start with (body-soul), and the notion that the joint can be mended with a 'mechanism.' Socialist feminists, who have a genuine grudge against the 'silences' of Marxism, attempt by arduous exercises of theory to insert a new flywheel (reproduction of the labour force) into the orrery, hoping that its inertia will somehow miraculously motor all the variegated 'development forms' of sexual repression and expression, familial modes and gender roles. But what is wrong is not that they have proposed the problem, but that they have reduced it to a pseudo-problem by attempting to insert it into a machine designed for its exclusion. And, at the same time, they have been tricked into dismantling their problem's whole challenge and identity, and have subdued it to the same general blight.

A cloud no bigger than a man's hand crosses the English Channel from Paris, and then, in an instant, the trees, the orchard, the hedgerows, the field of wheat, are black with locusts. When at length they rise to fly on to the next parish, the boughs are bared of all culture, the fields have been stripped of every green blade of human aspiration; and in those skeletal forms and that blackened landscape, theoretical practice announces its 'discovery': the mode of production. Not only substantive knowledge, but also the very vocabularies of the human project – compassion, greed, love, pride, self-sacrifice,

loyalty, treason, calumny – have been eaten down to the circuits of capital. These locusts are very learned platonists: if they settled on *The Republic* they would leave it picked clean of all but the idea of a contradiction between a philosopher and a slave. However elaborated the inner mechanisms, torsions, and autonomies, theoretical practice constitutes the ultimate in reductionism: a reduction, not of 'religion' or 'politics' to 'economics', but of the disciplines of knowledge to one kind of 'basic' Theory only. Theory is for ever collapsing back into ulterior theory. In disallowing empirical enquiry, the mind is confined forever within the compound of the mind. It cannot walk abroad. It is struck down with theoretical cramp, and the pain is tolerable on condition that it does not move its limbs.

That, then, is the system of *closure*. It is the place where all *Marxisms*, conceived of as self-sufficient, self-validating, self-extrapolating theoretical systems, must end. At its worst (and this is where it is usually at) theoretical practice is the end, and we may thank Althusser for demonstrating this with such 'rigour.' But if we return to 'experience' we can move, from that point, once again into an *open* exploration of the world and of ourselves. This exploration makes demands of equal theoretical rigour, but within that dialogue of conceptualisation and empirical engagement which we have already examined (pp. 53–4). This exploration may still be within the Marxist tradition, in the sense that we are taking Marx's hypotheses and some of his central concepts, and setting these to work. But the end of this exploration is not to discover a (reformed) finite conceptual system, *Marxism*. There is and can never be such a finite system.

I am sorry to disappoint those practitioners who suppose that all that it is necessary to know about history can be constructed from a conceptual meccano set. One can only return, in the end, from these explorations with better methods and a better map; with a certain sense of the whole social process; with expectations as to process and as to structured relationships; with a certain way of situating oneself before the materials; with certain key concepts (themselves to be employed and tested and

reformed) of historical materialism: class, ideology, mode of production. On the margins of the map we will always meet the boundaries of the unknown. What remains to be done is to interrogate the real silences, through the dialogue of knowledge; and as these silences are penetrated, we do not just sew up one new concept to the old fabric, we find it is necessary to re-order the whole *set* of concepts. There is no innermost altar that is sacrosanct against interrogation and revision.

Here lies the difference between *Marxism* and the Marxist tradition. It is possible to practise as a Marxist but to regard *Marxisms* to be obscuranticisms – as, manifestly, in a dozen forms, they have become. This has nothing to do with one's admiration for Marx and his work. On the contrary, to admire that work is to place oneself as apprentice to it, to employ its terms, to learn to work in a dialogue of the same kind. But emulation should never rest upon literal-minded reverence – not even (as with Althusser) pretended reverence for what Marx intended to say but, unaccountably, forgot. It must arise from an understanding of the provisional and exploratory nature of all theory, and the openness with which one must approach all knowledge. This must also entail a respect for the continuity of intellectual culture, which is not to be seen as fractured into two halves, between the B.C. and A.D. of Marx's 'epistemological break', and in which all other minds and knowledges are to be measured against the rule of Marxist Science.

It is the very notion of *Marxism* as 'Science' that we find the authentic trade-mark of obscuranticism, and of an obscuranticism borrowed, like so much else, from a bourgeois ideology of great longevity. Utilitarians, Malthusians, Positivists, Fabians, and structural-functionalists, all suppose(d) themselves to be practising a 'science', and the most unabashed academic centre of brutalised capitalist ideology in contemporary England acclaims itself as a School of Economics and Political Science. When Marx and Engels claimed that they were applying scientific methods to the study of society, the claim may, on occasion, be upheld; when they supposed that they were founding a Science (*Marxism*) they were locking prison-gates upon their

own knowledge.

The matter is now more grave than that. *Marxism* has for decades been suffering from a wasting disease of vulgar economism. Its motions have been enfeebled, its memory failing, its vision obscured. Now it has swiftly passed into a last delirium of idealism, and the illness must prove terminal. Theoretical practice is, already, the *rigor mortis* of *Marxism* setting in. *Marxism* no longer has anything to tell us of the world, nor any way of finding out.

The impulse is to fly for our reason from this scene of devastation. Honourable men, like Cornelius Castoriadis, who have not abandoned for an instant their engagement with capitalism, have left the Marxist tradition in this way: they see it as irreparable, inherently élitist, dominative and anti-democratic (the 'scientists' and the vulgar rest), and condemned by its orthodox and Stalinist fruits.¹⁶⁷ And I go with their critique a good part of the way (a salute, old comrades of *Socialisme ou Barbarie!*): some part I have stated in my own terms. But even in their bitter polemic with 'Marxism' we see that they are employing – and putting to better use – concepts which they first learned from Marx. For *Marxisms* and the tradition of open, empirical enquiry, originating in the work of Marx, and employing, developing, and revising his concepts, have never been the same thing.

So, then, why fight over a name? For a *Marxism* I would not fight, for I would fight with a guilty conscience. Marx was often wrong, and sometimes wrong in damaging ways. Not all Althusser's licences of authority are as spurious as his sentence from *The Poverty of Philosophy*. Some part of Marx points towards a system and 'science' in ways which afford uncomfortable continuities to the isms and State ideologies of our time. The 'Grundrisse face' of Marx, the notion of capital's 'immanence', affords a premonition of Althusser, although these premonitions are plainly contradicted in a hundred other places. Marx shares with other great and fertile thinkers (Hobbes, Machiavelli, Milton, Pascal, Vico, Rousseau) an ambiguity inherent in the very vigour and openness of their

thought. In taking us across a threshold, he leaves us at a door; we leave old problems behind, and we gain, exactly, a perspective upon the further range of problems ahead, some of which he could see, but few of which he could (in anticipation) solve. He places us in a new theoretical space, from which alternative developments lead forward. One name for this space is ambiguity, another is possibility. The very diversity of schools of thought which all claim a common Marxist inheritance (and all of which can produce difference licences of authority) is proof of that.

Marxism has been one possible development, although one with only an attenuated relationship to Marx. But the open, exploratory, self-critical Marxist tradition has been another development altogether. Its presence can be found in every discipline, in many political practices, and in every part of the world.

I had intended, at this point, to insert some comments upon a Marxist tradition which I know well – that of historiography. But I will reserve these notes for another place.¹⁶⁸ I don't wish to personalise what is a very severe and general intellectual crisis, nor to allow it to be supposed that I am placing some 'Anglo-Marxist tradition' against the 'Franco-Marxism' of Althusser. The first tradition is not Anglo-Saxon: it is vigorous, not only in Scotland and Wales, but in France and in India, in Italy and (as, for example, in the tenacious tradition of *Monthly Review*) in the United States: nor is it, in any sense, confined to historiography. The second is not representative of the best French socialist thought, and is only one extreme systematisation of systems which are found as state ideologies or within 'Western Marxism.' Nor do I have any authority to speak for my fellow historians in the British Marxist tradition.

I will therefore simply indicate this as one location for an alternative tradition. And make one comment. Those who suppose (and these include half the *lumpen-intelligentsia* of Oxbridge) that Althusser and his colleagues were making some novel and 'flexible' reappraisals of the Marxist 'problematic' when they gestured at 'relative autonomy' and 'in the last

instance' – and that before this 'revolution' all practising Marxists were subdued to vulgar dogma or dumb 'empiricism' – these people are simply disclosing their ignorance of historical and cultural materialism. In particular, their knowledge of history can only have been gathered from travellers' tales; and from such travellers as 'Sir John Mandeville', the good burgher of Liège, who never left his notary's office.

'Relative autonomy' was where we started from, and we started with the aid of others who had started therefore before us. It would, after all, have been somewhat difficult for us to have examined the drama of Aeschylus, ancient Greek science, the origins of Buddhism, the city-state, Cistercian monasteries, utopian thought, Puritan doctrines, feudal tenures, the poetry of Marvell, Methodist revivalism, the symbolism of Tyburn, *grandes peurs* and riots, Behmenist sects, primitive rebels, economic and imperialist ideologies, and every type of class confrontation, negotiation and refraction, without, somewhere along the line, stumbling upon a difficulty. I do not claim that 'we' have done all this expertly, definitively, or even well. My concern is a different one; it is to emphasise that we entered, through historical experience, directly into the real silences of Marx.

What did we find? Not, I fear, a better Theory (historical materialist as a new closed *ism*). We found some new knowledge, we developed our own methods and the discourse of our discipline, and we advanced towards a common understanding of the full historical process. What else we discovered is more controversial, and I can only report my own sense of this. We confirmed all of those late warnings of Engels: it is impossible to move, by the change of a letter, from the capitalist mode of production to capitalism as a social formation. We explored, both in theory and in practice, those junction-concepts (such as 'need', 'class', and 'determine') by which, through the missing term, 'experience', structure is transmuted into process, and the subject re-enters into history. We greatly enlarged the concept of class, which historians in the Marxist tradition commonly employ – deliberately and not out of some

theoretical 'innocence' – with a flexibility and indeterminacy disallowed both by *Marxism* and by orthodox sociology. And at 'experience' we were led on to re-examine all those dense, complex and elaborated systems by which familial and social life is structured and social consciousness finds realisation and expression (systems which the very rigour of the discipline in Ricardo or in the Marx of *Capital* is designed to exclude): kinship, custom, the invisible and visible rules of social regulation, hegemony and deference, symbolic forms of domination and of resistance, religious faith and millenarian impulses, manners, law, institutions and ideologies – all of which, in their sum, comprise the 'genetics' of the whole historical process, all of them jointed, at a certain point, in common human experience, which itself (as distinctive *class* experiences) exerts its pressure on the sum.

When I say that 'we' explored outwards in this way, I don't mean that we were the first-comers, or that we were unaided by historians, anthropologists and others in different traditions. Our debts are manifold. But, in my view, we did not discover other, and co-existent, *systems*, of equal status and coherence to the system of (anti) Political Economy, exerting co-equal determining pressures: a Kinship Mode, a Symbolic Mode, an Ideological Mode, etc. 'Experience' (we have found) has, in the last instance, been generated in 'material life', has been structured in class ways, and hence 'social being' has determined 'social consciousness.' *La Structure* still dominates experience but from that point her determinate influence is weak. For any living generation, in any 'now', the ways in which they 'handle' experience defies prediction and escapes from any narrow definition of determination.

I think that we have found out something else, of even greater significance for the whole project of socialism. For I introduced, a few pages back, another necessary middle term: 'culture.' And we find that, with 'experience' and 'culture' we are at a junction-point of another kind. For people do not only experience their own experience as ideas, within thought and its procedures, or (as some theoretical practitioners suppose) as proletarian

instinct, etc. They also experience their own experience as *feeling*, and they handle their feelings within their culture, as norms, familial and kinship obligations and reciprocities, as values or (through more elaborated forms) within art or religious beliefs. This half of culture (and it is a full one-half) may be described as affective and moral consciousness.

This is, exactly, *not* to argue that 'morality' is some 'autonomous region' of human choice and will, arising independently of the historical process. Such a view of morality has never been materialist enough, and hence it has often reduced that formidable inertia – and sometimes formidable revolutionary force – into a wishful idealist fiction. It is to say, on the contrary, that every contradiction is a conflict of value as well as a conflict of interest; that inside every 'need' there is an affect, or 'want', on its way to becoming an 'ought' (and *vice versa*); that every class struggle is at the same time a struggle over values; and that the project of Socialism is guaranteed by *nothing* – certainly not by 'Science', or by Marxism-Leninism – but can find its own guarantees only by *reason* and through an open *choice of values*.

And it is here that the silence of Marx, and of most *Marxisms*, is so loud as to be deafening. It is an odd silence, to be sure, since as we have already noted (p. 78), Marx, in his wrath and compassion, was a moralist in every stroke of his pen. Besieged by the triumphant moralism of Victorian capitalism, whose rhetoric concealed the actualities of exploitation and imperialism, his polemical device was to expose all moralism as a sick deceit: 'the English Established Church will more readily pardon an attack on 38 of its 39 articles than on 1/39th of its income.' His stance became that of an anti-moralist. This was true, in equal degree, of Engels, whose inadequate arguments in *Anti-Dühring* I do not mean to examine. By the 1880s, Engels's overt distaste for moralism was such that he looked straight through the extraordinary genius of Morris, and failed even to notice what was there.

To the end of his life, when confronting, in his anthropological researches, problems manifestly demanding analysis in

terms not derivative from Political Economy, Marx – while acknowledging the problems – was always trying to shove them back into an economic frame of reference. When Maine referred to ‘the mass of influences, which we may call for shortness moral’, Marx impatiently annotated the text: ‘This “moral” shows how little Maine understand of the matter; as far as these influences (economical before everything else) possess a “moral” modus of existence, this is always a derived, secondary modus and never the prius.’¹⁶⁹ But this is not any analysis: it is simply a refusal to break a silence. If the ‘moral’ influences exist as a moral ‘modus’ then they exist and must be analysed in a vocabulary of norms, values, obligations, expectations, taboos, etc. That they are ‘economical before everything else’ and are ‘derived, secondary’ is a pre-judgement; or, more politely, an hypothesis, which nowhere in Marx’s work is fully examined, which his major project excludes from consideration, and which, in its turn, is derived from a particular and limited definition of the ‘economic.’ In this whole area Morris was immensely more perceptive than Engels or Marx.

This silence was transmitted to the subsequent Marxist tradition in the form of a repression. This repression, in its turn, made it more easy for the major tradition to turn its back upon Morris (and many other voices) and to capitulate to an economism which, in fact, simply took over a bourgeois utilitarian notion of ‘need’; and, as a necessary complement to this, to foster a paltry philistinism towards the arts. It was only necessary for Marxist Science to enter into the kingdom of Socialism, and all else would be added thereunto. And Marxism-Leninism-Stalinism did. And we know with what results.

That is a crassly over-simplified account of a more complex, and more contested, development. But we have now tracked the last of Althusser’s ogres, ‘moralism’, to its lair. Its lair is found to be, less in the forest of bourgeois ideology, than deep in the heart of the international working-class movement itself. This ogre has given to that movement a utopian nerve of aspiration, the muscles of solidarity, and, on occasion, the courage of

revolutionary self-sacrifice. It has also, on repeated occasions, impelled revolts and defections within Communist Parties, and a running polemic against the practices of those Parties and the moral vacancy of the Marxist vocabulary. In 1956 it assumed the proportions of a mass revulsion within the international Communist movement against Stalinist practices and apologetics; its most articulate spokesmen (the ogres incarnate) were very often poets and novelists: Tuwim, Wazyk, Pasternak, Dery, Illyes, Solzhenitsyn. Once again, so far from Althusser advancing a critique of Stalinism, he is engaged in an ideological police-action against that critique, by attempting to disallow the most important terms in which that critique has been made.

In this case, and in this case only, the license of authority which Althusser produces is authentic. It is, indeed, signed by Marx and countersigned (with a caveat as to ‘truly human morality’) by Engels. This is, perhaps, why Althusser never bothers to argue the case, but can simply assume that all Marxists must agree that ‘moralism’ is a hideous enormity. What he has to say about ‘moralism’ is rarely specific. In *For Marx* and *Reading Capital* the problem’s presence is to be noted mainly in the careful strategies employed to ensure its absence from the text. On the one hand, all questions of norms, affective relationships and rules, are dismissed in the same gesture that dismisses ‘anthropology’ (p. 196). This enables him (and all theoretical practitioners) to set aside unread fifty years of work in social history, anthropology, and adjacent disciplines, some of it by Marxist practitioners, and all of it enlightening the problem of ‘relative autonomy’ which is supposedly an object of Althusser’s rigorous labours.

On the other hand, ‘morality’ is simply equated to ‘bourgeois morality’: i.e. ideology. This is a ‘world of alibis, sublimations and lies’, or, with ‘politics and religion’, a world of ‘myths and drugs’ (*FM.* 140, 145), and Marxists can have no interest in it except to demystify it. ‘Moralism’, or ‘the recourse of ethics’, is the shadow of ‘humanism’, whose function (we remember) is to offer ‘an imaginary treatment of real problems.’ Old comrades will certainly recognise this invincible Stalinist formula –

pronounced on every uncomfortable occasion by every Party hack: true morality equals whatever furthers the best interests of the working class: the Party, guided by Marxist 'science', is best able to decide what those best interests are (and how lucky the working lass is to have Daddy to do that!); and since what are at issue are *interests*, which can be determined with the precision of science, no choice of values (or of means) can be involved. When it was decided that, after his death, by the Party, that Stalin was in some points wrong, no question of Stalinism's moral stench was involved – an investigation of *that* might have brought even Marxism and the Party under suspicion. The vocabulary permitted only 'errors' and 'mistakes' (misjudgement of best interests) to be allowed. That, after some years, the decidedly-unscientific term, 'crimes', has now been allowed may be attributed, not to revisionism, but to an opportunist reflex in the face of the accusing moral sensibility of the millions.

There is something more in Althusser's subsequent essay on 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses' (*L.& P.* pp.123–173). This is, perhaps, the ugliest thing he has ever done, the crisis of the idealist delirium. I will spare myself the tedium of criticism, since in its naivety, its refusal of all relevant evidence, and its absurd idealist inventions, it exposes itself. 'Ethics', etc., are offered as an ideological State apparatus (and only as that), imposed upon the innocent and utterly passive, recipient, man, by means of 'the family State apparatus' and 'the educational State apparatus.' This ideology imposes upon individuals 'the imaginary relationships . . . to their real conditions of existence.' And to explain how it does this, Althusser invents a (wholly imaginary) device of 'interpellation' or 'hailing', by which the State via its ideological apparatus ('religious, ethical, legal, political, aesthetic, etc.!) cries out to individuals: 'Ahoy, there!' It is only necessary for the State to hail them, and they are 'recruited' instantly to whatever 'imaginary relationship' the State requires. Hailing has always gone one, and it always will, in any society. This is so, not because people cannot live and sustain relationships without

values and norms, but because 'ideology . . . is indispensable in any society if men are to *be formed*, transformed and equipped to respond to the demands of their conditions of existence.' (*FM.* 235) (Notice, once again, the passive, transitive form, the reification of agency by the Other.) By means of 'interpellation', or hailing, men and women are constituted (within ideology) as (imaginary) subjects: for example, as Jeunes Étudiants Catholiques or as Ulster Protestants.

It is a touching scenario, and one which could only have been written by a gentleman who has lived a retired life. It suggests a future for its author as a script-writer for 'Watch with Mother.' The wicked witch of State appears! The wand of ideology is flourished! And, hey presto! Not only has the prince become a frog, but the entire coach-and-six of the reformist trade union movement (another 'ideological State apparatus') has become a match-box drawn by six white mice. But if any readers in this country have been imposed upon (or 'interpellated') by the loud-hailing of the several British import agencies for 'Western Marxism' (including *hélas*, one heavy import agency which, some years ago, I had a part in founding) to suppose that this is the best that the Marxist tradition in France can do with sociology, communications and educational theory, etc., then I beg them to be disabused. They might commence their re-education by attending to Pierre Bourdieu.

What is obvious about these tormented constructions is that they are the desperate devices employed by a naive rationalism in an attempt to trick up a new rationalist explanation for non-rational behaviour: that is, the affective and moral consciousness must somehow be construed as displaced rationality ('ideology') and not as *lived experience* 'handled' in distinctive ways. (Althusser might at least have learned from Merleau-Ponty that consciousness is *lived* as much as it is *known*.)¹⁷⁰ These devices can, as always, boast formidable credentials within bourgeois ideology. The 'value'/'fact' antinomy, in which 'value' or 'morality' is supposedly an autonomous area of choice resting upon the de-socialised individual, has continually reappeared as its *alter ego*: the eviction of value from social and

economic 'science', the segregation of 'morality' within the pallisades of 'the personal' – a socially-ineffectual space of private preferences. (We are permitted, today, to have 'moral' preferences about sexual conduct, but the questions of economic 'growth' are scientific matters in which no choices of value are entailed.) The good old utilitarian notion that all facts are quantifiable and measurable (and hence can be ingested by a computer), and that whatever is not measurable is not a fact, is alive and kicking and in possession of a large part of the Marxist tradition. And yet, what cannot be measured has had some very measurable material consequences.

This may explain why theoretical practitioners refuse to admit historical evidence to their seminars on 'moralism' and 'ideology'. Historians would very soon have to point out that all that was being done was to invent for utilitarianism a new set of idealist credentials. Values are neither 'thought' nor 'hailed'; they are lived, and they arise within the same nexus of material life and material relations as do our ideas. They are the necessary norms, rules, expectations, &c, learned (and 'learned' within feeling) within the *'habitus'* of living; and learned, in the first place, within the family, at work, and within the immediate community. Without this learning social life could not be sustained, and all production would cease.

This is not to say that values are independent of the colouration of ideology; manifestly this is not the case, nor how, when experience itself is structured in class ways, could this be so? But to suppose from this that they are 'imposed' (by a State!) as 'ideology' is to mistake the whole social and cultural process. This imposition will always be attempted, with greater or less success, but it cannot succeed at all unless there is some *congruence* between the imposed rules and view-of-life and the necessary business of living a given mode of production. Moreover, values no less than material needs will always be a locus of *contradiction*, of struggle between alternative values and views-of-life. If we say that values are learned within lived experience and are subject to its determinations, we need not therefore surrender to a moral or cultural relativism. Nor need

we suppose some uncrossable barrier between value and reason. Men and women argue about values, they choose between values, and in their choosing they adduce rational evidence and interrogate their own values by rational means. This is to say that they are *as much but no more* determined in their values as in their ideas and actions, they are *as much but no more* 'subjects' of their own affective and moral consciousness as of their general history. Conflicts of value, and choices of value, always take place. When a person joins or crosses a picket-line, that person is making a choice of values, even if the terms of the choice and some part of what that person chooses *with* are socially and culturally determined.

Historical and cultural materialism cannot explain 'morality' away as class interests in fancy dress, since the notion that all 'interests' can be subsumed in scientifically-determinable material objectives is nothing more than utilitarianism's bad breath. Interests are what interest people, including what interests them nearest to the heart. A materialist examination of values must situate itself, not by idealist propositions, but in the face of culture's material abode: the people's way of life, and, above all, their product and familial relationships. And this is what 'we' have been doing, and over many decades.

Althusserian notions of 'ideology' have the quaintness of an antique, a piece of ornate rationalist Victoriana. We have examined the value-systems of peasantries, of the patriarchal household, the acquisitive values of insurgent capitalism (and the intense struggles around these), the values of foresters, yeomen, artisans, handloom-weavers, factory workers. We have examined these as a locus of conflict, at inarticulate, sub-articulate, sublimated, and at complex and arduously-contested levels of articulacy (what else is *The Country and the City* about?). For the affective and moral consciousness discloses itself within history, and within class struggles, sometimes as a scarcely-articulate inertia (custom, superstition), sometimes as an articulate conflict between alternative, class-based value-systems (the 'moral economy' of the crowd, the confrontation around the 1834 Poor Law), sometimes as a displaced,

confused, but none-the-less 'real' and passionate encounter within religious forms (Methodism, millenarianism), sometimes as the brutal imposition by Church or State of a 'moralism' (the sanctified burning of heretics, sanctified Stalinist State 'trials'), and sometimes as one of the most rigorous and complex disciplines known within intellectual culture – the full disclosure of values, and the rational argument between values, exemplified in literature and in a certain kind of disciplined moral critique.

All this will not go away because it is defined out of our Theory. I can only suppose, from certain references of theoretical practitioners to 'moralism', that these imagine a moral choice, or a choice between values, to be a kind of grunt, and a grunt which is the reflex of 'ideology'; and that they suppose that one grunt is as good as any other, and have never noticed that it may take the form of a discipline with its own arduous and relevant 'discourse of the proof.' There are, of course, rotten 'moralisms' just as there are rotten ideologies and philosophies (we have been examining one). And in so far as the full disclosure of choices between values is inhibited, in so far as the articulate 'discourse of the proof' is actively suppressed, so any value-informed view of life will rot away into rhetoric and hypocritical moralistic oratory. This is, exactly, the case with Stalinism; this is, exactly, why Stalinism has always most distrusted poets; this is, exactly, why the intellectual apologists for Stalinism have always sought to block off any possible moral critique; and this is, exactly, why one form of the protest against Stalinist ideology and forms has very often been 'moralistic', but, since it has been denied every opportunity for open articulation, it often appears as a kind of *displaced*, illusory, and, of necessity, 'utopian' moralism – as a reversion to Greek Orthodox faith, as nationalist self-exclusion, as personalist self-isolation, or as Solzhenitsyn – as the agonised heartbeat within a heartless world. And so, we may confidently predict, the Soviet Union will continue to astonish us; ever more bizarre and immaterial forms of moral consciousness will arise as 'super-structure' upon that severely-scientific material 'base'. The Soviet repressive and ideological State apparatuses, in inhibiting

any open argument about values, have not only denied to 'individuals' the right of 'self-expression', they have denied to Soviet society the means to express, and to examine, itself.

Thus the moral critique of Stalinism has never been some grunt of moral autonomy. It has been a very specific and practical political critique. It has concerned particular forms and practices within the international Communist movement; the subordination of the imagination (and of the artist) to the wisdom of the Party; the imposition of a notion of 'political realism', which refuses any debate over values, at every level of the Party organisation; the economistic strategies and the narrow propaganda of material need, which is blind to whole areas of (sexual, cultural) need, which despises the people's own cultural resources, and which assumes, but does not permit people to choose, what they really 'want'. As a result, in its inhibition of all 'utopianism', and in its repression of the 'education of desire', it reproduces, within capitalism, the very reasons of capital – the utilitarian definition of 'need' – and hence, in the very moment that it offers to struggle against its power, it inculcates obedience to its rules.¹⁷¹ Theoretical practice, in its spurious pretensions to be Science, is seeking to validate the bad faith of the Marxist tradition, and is reproducing as ideology the central vacancy of Stalinism.

It was the oldest error of rationalism to suppose that by defining the non-rational out of its vocabulary it had in some way defined it out of life. I rediscovered this, with a happy sense of recognition, in a recent debate on 'moralism' in the pages of *Radical Philosophy*. The practitioners, who as yet are only apprentices to Theory, should not be scolded too much. But we move here, with solemnity, through three propositions. (1) All morality = ideology. Thus: for Marx, 'morality was an historically specific ideological institution functioning to mystify and discipline people in accordance with the oppressive and exploitive needs of class society.'¹⁷² (Marx certainly never said that; insofar as he afforded licence for some of that to be said, one can only say 'alas!', and recall how far his contemporary thought was saturated with the same rationalist illusions.) But

the equation is derived, not only from Marx, but from 'Historical Materialism' (whose products these authors have evidently found it unnecessary to consult). Marxist history, it seems, has demonstrated that 'moral ideology has a socially repressive function.'

Proposition (2). In contradistinction to 'moral ideology' (which the ruling class inculcates for its own convenience) we are to suppose that 'a form of practical reason is possible which is in no sense moral or socially repressive.' Moral ideology 'must be antagonistic to natural values (happiness, the satisfaction of wants).' Thus there are 'naturalistic' imperatives (simple ones, like 'happiness') and these can be instantly deduced by 'reason.' 'The removal of moral motives would leave man . . . to rationally pursue his naturalistic ends.' This, apart from leaving the reason inside a split infinitive, would leave no other problems:

Practical reason of a non-moral kind involves understanding one's own needs, developing them in such a way that their most satisfying form of satisfaction is possible, gaining knowledge and therefore power over the world, selecting the best means for the satisfaction of needs, etc.

But – a shadow passes across this sunlit field at the recollection of the possible egotism of *other* people which might interfere with 'one' satisfying one's needs satisfactorily – this 'practical reason' must 'often be in the collective mode, i.e. the question will be not "what shall I do" but "what shall we do", collective naturalistic self-interest being the ground for choice.'

Our learned Theban, having disposed of this problem to his satisfaction, passes forward to proposition (3). A classless society will see the withering away of all morality. 'The elimination of moral ideology is . . . taken as a rational desideratum.'

The classical position of Marxism on this subject is that morality as an autonomous form of practical reason would disappear with the abolition of class antagonisms.

Moreover, we can hasten that about living naturalistically now:

There is no moral basis for socialism, no such thing as 'living as a socialist' within capitalist society, and no imperatives incumbent upon socialists as such other than that of working for socialism. How a socialist gets his money or his kicks is politically irrelevant.¹⁷³

Proposition (1): Morality = Ideology. (2) But there are 'naturalistic ends', a 'collective naturalistic self-interest', which can be determined by reason. (3) Classless society will ensure the withering away of morality with a rider as to present-day money and kicks which (it is fair to note) one or two fellow practitioners disputed.¹⁷⁴ The rest, it seems, could be taken as the 'classical position of Marxism'! Morality is a repressive mechanism for inhibiting the naturalistic libido.

'O, reason not the need . . . '! One might be pardoned for supposing that some apprentice practitioners have no more notion of the social formation (and clash) of values that might be afforded by recollections of nasty school rules and even nastier family quarrels. The 'ideological State apparatus' (*sic!*) of the only family that ever appears in their writing is, indeed, hideously repressive:

In the monogamous nuclear family, however liberal, the child is at the mercy of her family, deprived of responsibility (determining agency) or choice of friends, and denied the opportunity for full, wide and many-sided relationships with peers and older people. Thus are reinforced the isolated, anxiety-ridden, competitive character structures of the bourgeoisie and as well, the tamed law-aspiring proletarian.¹⁷⁵

The description is, perhaps, a touch moralistic (even priggish) – and, since 'Marxism' (or Althusser) has demonstrated that the notion of 'responsibility' (determining agency) in *adults* is a noxious humanist illusion, how is it that children do not come within the same theoretical provision?

Never mind. The quarrels (one might hazard) have been about such 'naturalistic ends' as sex, money and pot. And this reminds us that the repudiation of all 'moralism' has been very much the mode for some time. The revolting young bourgeoisie have long been into doing their own things, and, if they are

moralists at all, this comes out in their disapproval of all 'heavy' speeches from their elders about 'oughts.' The more sensitive among them have not only been *into* doing their own thing, they are already coming *out*, chastened, at the thing's other side. They have discovered that to have 'the most satisfying form of satisfaction' sometimes leaves the source of satisfaction as a heart-broken wreck; that egos must be socialised and humanised (or sat upon) if they are not to make each others' lives into a hell; that 'happiness' does not come, like a dog, to the whistle of reason; that 'socialists' who get their money and kicks in certain ways will also be somewhere else in any political emergency; and that even those monstrous apparatuses, the family and school, have one or two functions subsidiary to that of repression.

So – some of these revolting young bourgeois are doing O.K. They may yet take their parts in the socialist movement, while the others – the egotists who posture as 'revolutionaries' as one of their 'kicks' – will no doubt graduate as vigilant headmasters and tyrannical papas. (I've seen all this, not only in my own empiricist 'experience', but also, repeatedly, in historical research.) Very soon the best of them will turn away from exclusive moral scrutiny of their own inter-personal affairs, and take a larger view of society. And there they will discover the same logic writ out at large. 'Gaining knowledge and therefore power over the world' will, for the unconstrained egotist, mean getting other people within his power. The reasons of Reason, unencumbered by the moral consciousness, become, very soon, the reasons of interest, and then the reasons of State, and thence, in an uncontested progression, the rationalisations of opportunism, brutality, and crime.

There is not, nor can there ever be, any 'naturalistic' morality, any 'naturalistic ends.' Certainly, historical and cultural materialism have never found them. Ends are chosen by our culture, which afford us, at the same time, our own medium of choosing and of influencing that choice. To suppose otherwise is to suppose that our 'needs' are *there*, somewhere outside of ourselves and our culture, and that, if only ideology would go

away, the reason would identify these needs at once.

And this, of course, is the moment of recognition. For we have gone back, in one swift step, to one of the dottiest moments in the Enlightenment. The 'naturalistic ends' were given, in a rational way, as self-interest by Adam Smith, but it was left to Bentham to invent a means of determining these needs 'in such a way that their most satisfying form of satisfaction is possible' – the Felicific Calculus. And the notion of 'the collective naturalistic self-interest' was proposed, in a rational way, by Rousseau and others (the general will, the common good); but it was left to William Godwin to ascend, by the spiral of Hartleyan associationist psychology, from self-interest to 'benevolence' – from which lofty height the enthroned Reason could see through all the spurious ideological bonds of sentiment – gratitude, love of kin, the family, the servitude of the irrational crowd:

This was the time, when all things tending fast
To depravation, the Philosophy
That promised to abstract the hopes of man
Out of his feelings, to be fix'd thenceforth
For ever in a purer element
Found ready welcome. Tempting region that
For Zeal to enter and refresh herself,
Where passions had the privilege to work
And never hear the sound of their own names;
But, speaking more in charity, the dream
Was flattering to the young ingenuous mind
Pleas'd with extremes, and not the least with that
Which makes the human Reason's naked self
The object of its fervour. What delight!
How glorious! in self-knowledge and self-rule,
To look through all the frailties of the world,
And, with resolute mastery shaking off
The accidents of nature, time, and place,
That make up the weak being of the past,
Build social freedom on its only basis,
The freedom of the individual mind,
Which, to the blind restraints of general laws
Superior, magisterially adopts
One guide, the light of circumstances, flash'd
Upon an independent intellect.

This great passage from a great work, *The Prelude*, reminds us that the mind has walked these cliffs before. It is itself – when taken in its full context – exemplary of that argument of values, that disciplined ‘discourse of the proof’ to which I have referred. Marxism also has offered often to ‘abstract the hopes of man/Out of his feelings’, and to fix them in the purer element of ‘science.’ And Stalinism was the empire, and theoretical practice is the vocabulary (with ‘moralism’, ‘humanism’, and human agency expelled from it in ignominy) –

Where passions had the privilege to work
And never hear the sound of their own names.

And Godwinism itself, which freaked out half the young intelligentsia in England between 1794 and 1798, was exactly such a moment of intellectual extremism, divorced from correlative action or actual social commitment, as we have seen in the last decade.

So, if we shift a digit around (1798/1978), we are in the same synchronic moment of structured time. But . . . the second time as farce. For those Godwinians, in the only moment when the English intelligentsia adopted, in their theory, an ultra-Jacobin posture, had some spirit about them. They questioned everything. They questioned Reason itself. Seconded by Wollstonecraft (who came less from a rationalist than from a Dissenting and Romantic tradition) they made the institution of marriage spin. They frightened everyone. They frightened, above all, themselves. Theoretical practice, however, can lay claim to only one achievement in this country. It has frightened Mr Julius Gould, who, in such matters, is well known to be an uncommonly nervous fellow. For the rest, it has been a diversion, a retreat into the privacy of a complacent internal discourse, a *disengagement* from the actual political and intellectual contests of our time.

As for the Godwinian moment, and its tragic aftermath, I hope to tell that story another time.

We left our ‘post-Stalinist’ reader, many pages back, enquiring: ‘Well? Did you identify the sources of Stalinism? Did you construct a better Theory?’

I hope that the answer to both questions has now become clear. Stalinism appeared to us, in those old days, less as a coherent theoretical system than as a mish-mash of repressive practices, dominative modes, hypocritical rhetoric, ‘wrong theories’, Leninist forms and tactics derived from the necessities of illegal agitation and turned into universalist axioms, and all this bound together within the short-sighted opportunism of the reasons of Soviet State power. Stalinism as high Theory did not precede but followed after the fact.

If we wished to translate its practices into a consistent theoretical system, then we would design a Theory in which close empirical analysis of its practices was, as a matter of epistemological principle, disallowed (‘empiricism’); in which any moral critique was utterly prohibited (‘moralism’); in which the universal validity of Leninist forms (but of forms in an advanced state of bureaucratic degeneration) was assumed without examination (the characteristic theoretical short-circuit, the proletariat = the Party); in which a structuralist reductionism both guaranteed the fundamental health of the Soviet system in its supposedly socialist economic ‘basis’ (thereby displacing all political, legal and cultural questions into secondary or tertiary areas) and disallowed any materialist historical analysis of this system (‘historicism’); in which men and women were seen as the bearers of ineluctable structural determinations, in which their responsibility and historical agency was denied (‘humanism’), and in which it was, hence, more easy to view them as ‘rotten elements’ or things; and all this united within a notion of Theory both as enclosure and as ‘science’, which Theory could be grasped in its essentials by the rigorous contemplation of texts written over one hundred years before the major historical experiences which it seeks to explain took place. In short, Althusserianism is Stalinism reduced to the

paradigm of Theory. It is Stalinism at last, theorised as ideology.

Thus there is a sense in which we failed fully to identify Stalinism as Theory, because we were waiting upon Althusser for this theory to be invented. But we did, at least, identify essential components of this theory, in its characteristic idealist mode of thought (p. 192), and we never comforted ourselves with the apology that Stalinism represented only some unaccountable 'rupture of theory and practice.'¹⁷⁶ Moreover, we saw, very clearly, that from its particular matrix in Soviet history, Stalinism had entered deeply within the theory, practices, strategies and forms of the international Communist movement; and, further, that the complicity of orthodox Marxism in funding Stalinism with its vocabulary of apologetics – in proving itself to be pliant enough to provide the elements for the State ideology of the Soviet bureaucracy – entailed the strong probability that Marxism itself stood in need of radical scrutiny, and that it would never be adequate to ravel it up again into a better *system*.

This gave us an agenda, and it is hardly surprising that this agenda could not be completed in six or seven years – years of heightened political activity. This also gives an answer to the second question. It was exactly the notion of Marxism as a self-sufficient theoretical Sum which constituted the essence of the metaphysical heresy against reason, and which inhibited the active investigation of the world within the developing, provisional, and self-critical tradition of historical materialism. I have argued this sufficiently.

Althusserianism is only one, sophisticated, form of a number of 'Marxisms' which pushed our unfinished agenda aside, and crowded into the minds of a section of the Western intelligentsia from the 1960s onwards. The case of Althusserianism is one of the simplest, since, as we have seen, it is a straightforward ideological police action. It constructs a theory which ensures not only that radical questions about Stalinism, Communist forms, and 'Marxism' itself are not asked, but that they *cannot be asked*. If we take Althusser at his own self-evaluation – if we suppose him to be 'innocent' – then we can only say that he has

lost himself so far inside his own head that when he looks at the world he sees only the projection of his own concepts: the P.C.F. is embodied proletarian ideology, Stalinism in decomposition is 'socialist humanism', the murder of a revolution's cadres is the dictatorship of the proletariat, the substantial gains over decades of the Western working classes are an index of their more intense exploitation. In a certain sense we can be charitable; there is a logic in all this; mechanical materialism ('economism') *must*, when every evidence from the real world disproves its theories, when every socialist expectation is abjectly falsified, stop up its ears and eyes, and pass abruptly into the delirium of idealism.

Not all the 'Marxisms' have been of this wholly reactionary order. There have also been various Maoisms, Trotskyisms,¹⁷⁷ and innumerable Marxist academicisms. Most of these share, however, the same religious case of thought, in which a Marxism is proposed as an ultimate system of truth: that is, a theology. All seek to put Marx back into the prison of *Marxism*. Why there should have been this 'epistemological break' from rationality to idealism, this rejection of the beginnings made in the 1950s and early 1960s, this reversion to an inner world of magical incantation and exalted theoretical illusion, this sealing off of the empirical senses, this self-closure of a tradition . . . this is a different problem, a problem of ideology and of the sociology of ideas which would require a distinct and extended treatment. I can now offer a few suggestions only.

Althusserianism is only one extreme form – and perhaps a passing form – of a general malaise, not of theory only, but of the political presence of today's Socialist movement. In marking off its characteristics *as ideology*, I intend to mark also certain features which it shares with other Marxisms of closure.

The ideology has arisen, and been replicated, not in the Soviet Union, but within an advanced intellectual culture in the West. Its characteristic location has been in universities and other educational institutions and for other reasons, by a sharp division between 'theory' and 'practice.' The radicalisation of intellectuals within these institutions is often a somewhat

enclosed and autonomous process, with no direct correlation with other sectors of society. So far from all Communist Parties providing this missing correlation, certain of these (for example, the PCF) directly express, in their organisational forms, another kind of severance of 'theory' from 'practice' – the higher echelons of the Party apparatus are possessed of the 'science' which guides the 'militants' of the 'base.' The Party intellectuals are often further segregated, both within Paris (the intelligentsia's provincial ghetto) and within their own university branches.

Thus we commence with a *de facto* sociological and intellectual segregation of theory and practice. And, for larger political reasons, the kind of experience of mass political activity, in which intellectuals have played a minority and a subordinate (sometimes overly subordinate) part alongside comrades of diverse experience – and, in particular, alongside comrades with practical positions of leadership within their own communities and places of work – this kind of experience has largely passed them by. There has been no experience of anti-Fascist struggle, war and Resistance; not even any consistent and hard-fought programmatic or electoral struggle which intellectuals could bear to support; May, 1968 was over in a matter of days; such industrial struggles as the British miners' strike, which brought a government down, were accomplished without the necessity of any intellectual participation. Of course, here and there real struggles have flared up; and some comrades have gained authentic experience in the intense inner life of this or that sect. But in general it may be said that there has never been a generation of socialist intellectuals in the West with *less* experience of practical struggle, with less sense of the initiatives thrown up in mass movements, with less sense of what the intellectual can learn from men and women of practical experience, and of the proper dues of humility which the intellect must owe to this.

This is to say that today's Western Leftist intelligentsia is distinguished by its lack of political experience and judgement. But this is not offered in any sense as an accusation of sin. It is

a necessary consequence of the determinations of our time. We cannot remedy it by wishing it was otherwise. But it provides, nevertheless, the necessary ground within which the ideological deformations of our time are nurtured. Isolated within intellectual enclaves, the drama of 'theoretical practice' may become a *substitute* for more difficult practical engagements. Moreover, this drama can assume increasingly theatrical forms, a matter of grimaces and attitudinising, a game of 'chicken', in which each theorist strives to be 'more revolutionary than thou.' Since no political *relations* are involved, and no steady, enduring struggle to communicate with and learn from a public which judges, cautiously, by actions rather than professions, the presses may reek with ideological terror and blood.

Moreover, this is precisely, the ground which can nurture an *élitism* for which intellectuals, by a multitude of precedents, are only too well prepared. A generation indoctrinated by selective educational procedures to believe that their own specialised talents are a guarantee of superior worth and wisdom, are only too willing to accept the role offered to them by Althusser. It is easy for them to posture as 'a very specific type of militant intellectual, a type unprecedented in many respects':

These are real initiates, armed with the most authentic scientific and theoretical culture, forewarned of the crushing reality and manifold mechanisms of all forms of the ruling ideology and constantly on the watch for them, and able in their theoretical practice to borrow – against the stream of all "accepted truths" – the fertile paths opened up by Marx and barred by all the reigning prejudices. (*F.M.* 24)

That Althusser should also predicate 'an unshakeable and lucid confidence is the working class and direct participation in its struggles' can be easily met, either by taking out a Party card, or by hypothesising an ideal working class (for the present one is mystified into a false consciousness) which will be engendered in the image of Theory. For, as Althusser insists, 'Marxist theory is produced by a specific theoretical practice, *outside* the proletariat', and 'Marxist theory must be "*imported*" into the proletariat'. (*R.C.* 141) Indeed, his whole account of Marx's

'epistemological break' proposed that Theory was prior to and independent of the working-class movement's own self-discovery, and that, ever since, that movement has been acting out, however inefficiently, Theory's script.

What is so obvious is that this new *élitism* stands as direct successor in the old lineage: Benthamism, Coleridgean 'clerisy', Fabianism, and Leavisism of the more arrogant variety. Once again, the intellectuals – a chosen band of these – have been given the task of enlightening the people. There is no mark more distinctive of Western Marxisms, nor more revealing as to their profoundly anti-democratic premises. Whether Frankfurt School or Althusser, they are marked by their very heavy emphasis upon the ineluctable weight of ideological modes of domination – domination which destroys every space for the initiative or creativity of the mass of the people – a domination from which only the enlightened minority of intellectuals can struggle free.¹⁷⁸ No doubt this ideological predisposition was itself nurtured within the terrible experiences of Fascism, of mass indoctrination by the media, and of Stalinism itself. But it is a sad premise from which Socialist theory should start (all men and women, except for us, are originally stupid) and one which is bound to lead on to pessimistic or authoritarian conclusions. Moreover, it is likely to reinforce the intellectual's disinclination to extend himself in practical political activity. To be sure, the (ideal) proletariat may, in this or that critical conjuncture, suddenly shift itself, like a geological fault, into a revolutionary posture, when it will be ready to receive the ministrations of Theory. Meanwhile, why bother to try to communicate – to educate, agitate, and organise – since the reason is powerless to penetrate the mists of 'ideology'?

In this way, a 'revolutionary' and 'Marxist' critique, which despairs of communication and which has only a fictional political correlative, and which, moreover, reveals that all social evils are insoluble within capitalism, ends up as 'the ideological husk of passivity', in which the proclaimed need for 'revolution' becomes a licence for intellectual withdrawal. In this way, as Enzensberger has warned,

Marxist theory . . . can become a false consciousness if, instead of being used for the methodical investigation of reality through theory and practice, it is misused as a defence against that very reality . . . Those who wish to deprive Marxism of its critical, subversive power and turn it into an affirmative doctrine, generally dig in behind a series of stereotyped statements which, in their abstraction, are as irrefutable as they are devoid of results.¹⁷⁹

Althusserian theory has been perfectly adapted to this function, and designed for exactly this *élitist* intellectual *couche*. In particular, it allows the aspirant academic to engage in a harmless revolutionary psycho-drama, while at the same time pursuing a reputable and conventional intellectual career. As we have seen, every central theoretical position of Althusser is heavily derivative from orthodox bourgeois positions, in epistemology, structuralist sociology, &c. The dwarfing of human initiatives by ideologies and things is entirely consonant with the dominant common-sense of conservative disciplines. Moreover, as political theory – because of the denial of experience and the repudiation of empirical controls – the practice can lead to *anything*, and justify *everything*; in any 'conjuncture' a political or ideological 'instance' can be hypothesised as 'dominant', and the 'kangaroo factor' will carry it blithely from one prejudice to the next.

If this is all that Althusserianism is, as ideology – if it is no more than one of the successive fashions by which the revolting Western intelligentsia can do their thing without practical pain – then we have been wasting our time. But it is more serious than that. It is actively reinforcing and reproducing the effective passivity before 'structure' which holds us all prisoners. It is enforcing the rupture between theory and practice. It is diverting good minds from active theoretical engagement. And, at a level of more vulgar political discourse, it affords theoretical legitimations for all the stupidest and most dangerous half-truths which, one had supposed, had at last gone away: that 'morality = the interests of the working class', that 'philosophy = class struggle', that 'democratic rights and practices = "liberal" ideology', and so on. Such a theory, if ever afforded

any power, so far from 'liberating' the working class would, in its insufferable arrogance and pretensions to 'science', deliver them into the hands of a bureaucratic clerisy: the *next* ruling-class, waiting on the line.

This outcome seems unlikely. Most of those who have fallen under Althusserian influence are not cut out to be Stalinist priests. They are simply young men and women, who would *like* to be socialist revolutionaries, who have not found a medium of practical engagement, and hence have been taken for a ride. The terminus of that ride is outside the city of human endeavour and outside the domain of knowledge. So we can expect them to be absent from both. And yet, at the same time, we should not forget that this Theory is affording comfort and arguments to the most conservative elements within the most conservative Communist apparatuses. Like all ideologies, this one confirms the situation out of which it arose. In strengthening the extreme right-wing of the 'Left', it reproduces that inertia and that paralysis of the socialist will which was its own pre-condition of existence.

I cannot say whether theoretical practice is being taken up within the State orthodoxies of the Soviet Union and of Eastern Europe. It is, I suspect, both too sophisticated and too undisguisedly Stalinist for that; after all, if Stalin were alive today, he would be the first to recognise that Stalin committed . . . errors. The ultimate dream of theoretical practice is the resuscitation of the duality of temporal and spiritual powers in medieval Christendom: the Holy Proletarian Emperor will make his pilgrimage to Theory's abode, where, after due interrogation in the doctrine, he will be crowned. This is not likely to come about. But a more sombre, and more conceivable, scenario comes to mind when one contemplates the situation in certain countries in the Third World. For Althusserianism is rather exactly tailored to the ideological requirements of an aspirant ruling-class – the *next* ruling-class to be – in societies where a section of the intelligentsia, greatly distanced from the masses, adopts policies which demand ruthless 'modernization', Marxist and anti-imperialist rhetoric, contempt for democratic

practices, and effective reliance on the economic and military protection of the Soviet State. If one considers for a moment the possible consequences if the Communist Party of India (one of the most unreconstructed Stalinist parties in the world) were to reinforce its existing anti-libertarian tendencies and contempt for the 'petit-bourgeois' masses – tendencies amply displayed in its partnership in the recent Emergency – with a dose of Althusserian arrogance; and if its largely bourgeois and intellectual upper cadres were to become theoretical practitioners; and if the opportunity to practice, not only in theory, but upon the body of India, should return – then we could expect nothing less than the re-enactment of the full repertoire of high Stalinism within the raging inferno of Indian 'scarcity'.¹⁸⁰

But we may leave this to the good sense of our comrades in India or Latin America, who face, every day, problems more palpable and more exacting than our own, who cannot pretend to draw the blinds upon experience or to place their theory here and their practice over there. All the same, it would be good to talk about it, and to exchange experiences on the political problems which we have in common. It would be good if the authentic international dialogue of libertarian Communism could be resumed.

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I will conclude, as is now obligatory, with an *auto-critique*.

Five years ago, in my 'Open Letter to Leszek Kolakowski', I discussed several meanings of contemporary Marxisms, and concluded with a general notion of Marxism as Tradition. Within this 'tradition' I saw an immense variety of discourse, and quite incompatible sub-traditions; but, nevertheless, I argued that (uncomfortable as such co-habitation may be) all were united in the sense of employing a common vocabulary of concepts, many of which derived from Engels and from Marx. I suggested that one must be resigned to the strenuous activity of continually defining one's position within this 'tradition'; and that the only alternative was that of evacuating this tradition altogether – a

choice which I refused. I preferred to remain within that tradition, even if some few of us remained only as 'outlaws.'

I can now see that this was an inadequate and evasive resolution. Politically, it has long been impossible for the Stalinist and anti-Stalinist positions to cohabit with each other. It is clear to me now, from my examination of Althusserianism – and my implicit critique of other related Marxisms – that we can no longer attach any theoretical meaning to the notion of a common tradition. For the gulf that has opened has not been between different accentuations to the vocabulary of concepts, between this analogy and that category, but between idealist and materialist modes of thought, between Marxism as closure and a tradition, derivative from Marx, of open investigation and critique. The first is a tradition of theology. The second is a tradition of active reason. Both can derive some licence from Marx, although the second has immeasurably the better credentials as to its lineage.

I must therefore state without equivocation that I can no longer speak of a single, common Marxist tradition. There are *two* traditions, whose bifurcation and disengagement from each other has been slow, and whose final declaration of irreconcilable antagonism was delayed – as an historical event – until 1956. From this point forward, it has been necessary, both within politics and within theory, to declare one's allegiance to one or the other. Between theology and reason there can be no room left for negotiation. Libertarian Communism, and the socialist and Labour movement in general, can have no business with theoretical practice except to expose it and drive it out.

If I thought that Althusserianism was the logical terminus of Marx's thought, then I could never be a Marxist. I would rather be a Christian (or hope to have the courage of a certain kind of Christian radical). At least I would then be given back a vocabulary within which value choices are allowed, and which permits the defence of the human personality against the invasions of the Unholy Capitalist or Holy Proletarian State. And if my disbelief, as well as my distaste for churches, disallowed this course, then I would have to settle for being an empirical,

liberal, moralistic humanist.

But I refuse these spurious choices which theoretical practice (and allied Marxisms) seek to impose. And, instead, I declare unrelenting intellectual war against such Marxisms: and I do so from within a tradition one of whose major founders was Marx. There is a certain cant, which has long been about, which seeks to avoid this engagement under the slogan: 'No enemies to the Left!' That slogan had a necessary and honourable origin, in the emergencies of anti-Fascist resistance; and, in political terms, such emergencies will often recur. But how is it possible to say that there are no such enemies, after the experience of high Stalinism, after Budapest 1956, after Prague 1968? And, within theory, what possible meaning is attached to 'the Left' when it teaches lessons of anti-moralism, anti-humanism, and the closure of all the empirical apertures of reason? Could Marx, or Morris, or Mann, have recognised any of the theory or practice of Stalinism, and acknowledged these as having even a notional relation to 'the Left'? Does the suppression of reason, and the obliteration of the imagination, have any place on 'the Left'? Does the confiscation by an all-knowing, substitutionist Party or vanguard of the self-activity and means of self-expression and self-organisation of the working people, constitute the practice of a 'Left'?

What the cant slogan does is simply erect a moralistic defence around orthodox Communist organisation and practices – defences supplemented by the 'ideological terrorism' of Althusser – intended to impress any socialist critic with a sense of guilt, a breach of solidarity. Hence the *status quo* is inviolable; any socialist critique is illicit (or is evidence of malicious 'bourgeois or Trotskyite slander'); and the only licit criticism must be within the slow and opportunistic procedures of the apparatus itself. Hence the fight against Stalinism as theory and as practice must be left for ever unresolved. And as a consequence we are constructed into a space within which we commit daily breaches of solidarity with our comrades who are striving to dismantle Stalinism and who suffer under the reasons of Communist power.

In declaring 'war' in this way – and in asking that others declare themselves less equivocally – I do not make a simple equation: Stalinism = all Communist organisations and forms. I do not declare all Communism to be infected, and suffering a terminal illness. I do not reject necessary, and clear-eyed, political alliances with Communist movements. I do not ignore the honourable (and, indeed, democratic) elements in the record of Communist struggle, in the West and in the Third World. I do not doubt the courage and commitment of Communist cadres, in a hundred anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist struggles. I do not confuse Stalinism as theory, and as particular forms and practice, with the historical and sociological existence of Communist mass movements. I do not deny that, within the turn towards 'Euro-Communism', genuine struggles over principle are involved, as well as opportunist adjustments to an electorate. I do not refuse to note the genuine concern – and the public registration of this concern – at aspects of Soviet reality which have been increasingly evident within 'Euro-Communism' since the time of Prague, 1968. I do not dismiss all this as hypocrisy; it is a welcome and important indication of an ulterior shift, often imposed upon the leadership by their own militant 'base'. Above all, I expect, in the coming decades, fresh reinforcements for the war against Stalinism to arise – whether East or West – from within the Communist movements themselves. How these struggles will eventuate – and with what differences in Poland, Spain or Bengal – is a historical question, as to which theory would be foolish to predict.

What I mean is, rather, this. First, libertarian Communism, or a Socialism which is both democratic and revolutionary in its means, its strategy and objectives, must stand firmly, on an independent base, on its own feet, developing its own theoretical critique and, increasingly, its own political forms and practices. Only on these presuppositions can any 'alliance' be negotiated; and if emergencies demand such an alliance, then it cannot be on orthodox Communism's usual imperative terms: that ulterior theoretical and strategic differences be obscured or silenced, in

the interests of a 'Broad Left' (whose interests, are, in turn, ultimately those of the Party).

Second, the conditions for any common action must be a continuing and unequivocal critique of every aspect of the Stalinist legacy. Until the 'agenda' of 1956 is completed, down to the last item of Any Other Business, any pretences as to the self-reform of Euro-Communism can rest only on the insecure pledges of electoral opportunism. The struggle must irradiate every level of theory and of practice – leading to radical changes in the forms of Communist Party organisation, and in the practical relations of Communists with other socialist bodies and with their own 'constituencies' – and only on these preconditions, that common action accelerates such changes and discloses ulterior differences, can our purposes be served.

In Britain, with its small and declining Communist Party, these questions are of secondary importance. But, equally, the failure of the alternative, libertarian tradition, to enter that vacuum and establish itself as a political presence alongside the Labour movement – this failure is the more serious and less explicable. In the much-publicised 'revival of Marxism' in Britain in the last two decades, a mountain of thought has not yet given birth to one political mouse. Enclosed within the intelligentsia's habitual élitism, the theorists disdain to enter into any kind of relation with a Labour movement which they know (on a priori grounds) to be 'reformist' and 'corporative', whose struggles created the institutions in which they are employed, whose labour made the chairs in which they sit, which manages to exist and to reproduce itself without them, and whose defensive pressures are all that stand between them and the reasons of capitalist power. Nor have these theorists created any independent agencies of political communication and education; the only agencies created are journals in which they can converse with each other. But this is to raise a new range of political questions, to be discussed on some other day.

I may sound more bitter than I am. I think there is, indeed, much energy and ability inside those barrels of enclosed Marxisms which stand, row upon row, in the corridors of

Polytechnics and Universities. By striking a sharp and bitter blow at the Althusserian bungs, I hope I may let a little of that energy get out. If it should do so, then the problems of creating in this country an independent Left, engaged in a continual and fraternal dialogue of practice with the large Labour movement, might not prove to be insuperable after all. Those massive and impassive 'structures' of our time might prove to be more vulnerable to human agencies than the Marxisms suppose.

And if any minds should get out, I hope they will bring Marx with them. I hope they will not bring only Marx; and they must certainly rid themselves of the truly scholastic notion that the problems of our time (and the experiences of our century) will become understood by the rigorous scrutiny of a text published one hundred and twenty years ago. To return, in every motion of analysis, to propositions of Marx is like going on a cross-country run in leaden boots. William Morris expressed the matter with unerring sanity. 'Tough as the job is you ought to read Marx', he advised a correspondent: 'up to date he is the only completely scientific Economist on our side.'¹⁸¹

As the assembled ranks of Marxists express their sense of scandal, or dissolve into laughter, I will continue my argument. It is not on the question of whether or not it is adequate to describe Marx as an 'Economist.' This was the Marx available to Morris; and, one might add, it is the Marx to which the man is reduced, in effect, by 'mode of production' manipulators and by *Capital* navel-scrutinising groups. The point is, that *Marx is on our side; we are not on the side of Marx*. His is a voice whose power will never be silenced, but it has never been the only voice, and its discourse does not have limitless range. He did not invent the socialist movement, nor did socialist thought in some way fall into his sole possession or that of his legitimate heirs. He had little to say (by choice) as to socialist objectives, as to which Morris and others said more – and more that is pertinent today. In saying this little he forgot (and at times appeared to deny) that not only Socialism but *any* future made by men and women rests not only upon 'science', or upon the determinations of necessity, but also upon choices of values, and the struggles to

give these choices effect.

The choice which faces the Marxist tradition today, and which has long faced it, is that between Idealist irrationalism and the operative and active reason. As for the Althusserians, they have long made that choice, and retired to the rituals of their own secluded observatory:

As if an astronomical observatory should be made without any windows, and the astronomer within should arrange the starry universe solely by pen, ink and paper, so M. Althusser, in *his* Observatory (and there are many like it) had no need to cast an eye upon the teeming myriads of human beings around him, but could settle all their destinies on a slate, and wipe out all their tears with one dirty little bit of sponge.¹⁸³

Maybe this observatory is already collapsing upon its rotten foundations. But other, more fashionable, more *avant-garde* observatories will be erected around its ruins. Before they are enclosed within some more well-appointed 'Marxism', I ask my readers also to choose.

I have now, on three occasions, beaten the bounds of '1956'. No doubt my critics are right; the return to that moment in the past has been, with me, obsessional; 'there have been few confessions of fossilization as sad as this.'¹⁸³ At each defeat one should pick oneself up, brush the dust off one's knees, and march cheerily on with one's head in the air. But what if the defeat be total and abject, and call in question the rationality and good faith of the socialist project itself? And what if the protagonists within the socialist movement finally disengage at that point, and their absolute antagonism becomes declared? Can one then go on, head even higher in the air, just as before? I do not think so. But I promise not to mention the matter again. My dues to '1956' have now been paid in full. I may now, with a better conscience, return to my proper work and to my own garden. I will watch how things grow.

NOTES

This essay is a polemical political intervention and not an academic exercise, and I have not thought it necessary to document every assertion. The editions of Althusser's work which I cite in the text are: *Essays – Essays in Self-Criticism* (New Left Books, 1976); *F.M. – For Marx* (Vintage Books, 1970); *L. & P. – Lenin and Philosophy* (New Left Books, 1971); *P. & H. – Politics and History* (New Left Books, 1977); *R.C. – Reading Capital* (New Left Books, 1970); *C.W. – Karl Marx, Frederick Engels, Collected Works* (Lawrence & Wishart, in progress); *Grundrisse* (Pelican, 1973).

1. I tried to distinguish 'empiricism' and an empirical 'idiom' in 'The Peculiarities of the English', *Socialist Register*, 1965, pp. 336–7.
2. B. Hindess and P.Q. Hirst, *Pre-Capitalist Modes of Production* (London, 1975), pp. 310, 312.
3. I am indebted for this category to my friend, Rodney Hilton, although he is not responsible for the ways in which I use it.
4. See Hans Magnus Enzensberger, *Raids and Reconstructions* (Pluto Press, 1976), p. 296; and (discussing 'a very dangerous form of internal exile') Raymond Williams, 'Notes on Marxism in Britain since 1945', *New Left Review*, 100, November 1976–January 1977, p. 92.
5. See Leszek Kolakowski, 'Althusser's Marx', *Socialist Register*, 1971, pp. 124–5; 'The reader with an elementary knowledge of the history of philosophy will notice at once that what Althusser means by "empiricism", could well be considered as the Aristotelian or Thomist theory of abstraction but that modern empiricism – beginning not with Locke but at least with fourteenth century nominalists – means exactly the opposite of this idea.'
6. Only later (*L. & P.* 53) did Althusser make a *sotto voce* acknowledgement that Lenin's categories 'may' have been 'contaminated by his empiricist references (e.g. the category of reflection).'
7. It has of course been so supposed, and in some quarters it still is: the opening chapters of Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford, 1977), are in one sense a sustained polemic against this supposition.
8. For the purposes of exposition in these pages, I leave aside the question of differential class experiences (and consequent ideological predispositions) which I discuss elsewhere.
9. The other two are mathematics – acclaimed, but not drawn upon – and psycho-analysis, from which certain concepts are confiscated in a most arbitrary way.
10. The influence, scarcely acknowledged in *F.M.* (although see p. 78, note 40), is more pronounced in *R.C.* (p. 102: 'Spinoza's philosophy

introduced probably the greatest philosophical revolution of all time'), and fully declared in *Essays*, pp. 104, 132–141, 187, 190. See the helpful comments of Perry Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism* (New Left Books, 1976) pp. 64–65, 85.

11. See the opaque footnote in *F.M.* pp. 184–185.
12. Althusser follows Bachelard's notion of a science which is constituted by an 'epistemological break' with its 'ideological' prehistory. Both *F.M.* (see pp. 167–8) and *R.C.* see post-1846 Marxism as constituting a Science ('Theory') in this way. In his subsequent self-criticism, Althusser takes away this notion with his left hand and then returns it (by way of the Party) with his right: *Essays*, pp. 107–125.
13. For an excellent demonstration of the incompatibility of Althusser's method with that of Marx, see Derek Sayer, 'Science as Critique: Marx versus Althusser' in J. Mepham and D. Rubin (eds.), *Essays in Marxist Philosophy* (Harvester, 1978). I have found this essay helpful throughout, and also the lucid and thorough study by Simon Clarke, 'Althusserian Marxism', an important study as yet unpublished (copies obtainable from the author, Dept. of Sociology, University of Warwick).
14. As defined in the Glossary to *R.C.* (p. 322) prepared by Ben Brewster and approved by Althusser.
15. See note 12 above. The emphasis in *R.C.* (pp. 59–60 and other passages) is such as to suggest that experiment and 'other practices' (while perhaps permissible in the natural sciences) are evidence as to a science's prehistory.
16. See my essay on 'Caudwell', *Socialist Register*, 1977, p. 241.
17. Marc Bloch, *The Historian's Craft* (Manchester, 1954), p. 58.
18. Lucien Goldmann, *The Human Sciences and Philosophy* (London, 1969), pp. 42–43.
19. The reasons for this congruence lie in the ulterior congruence of Althusserian and positivist epistemology. This was argued long ago, in a forcible polemic by Paul Piccone, 'Structuralist Marxism?', *Radical America*, III, no. 5, September, 1969, which concluded: 'Althusser is not aware of the history of recent positivism so that he does not realize that he has unwittingly appropriated their entire discarded problematic' (pp. 27–28). For an exact correspondence with Althusser's propositions, see M. Oakeshott, *Experience and its Modes* (Cambridge, 1933), p. 168. For a resumé of the congruence, see H. Gilliam, 'The Dialectics of Realism and Idealism in Modern Historiographic Theory', *History and Theory*, XV, 3, 1976.
20. K.R. Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies* (1962 edn.) II, pp. 265–8.

21. Hindess and Hirst follow the same positivist premises even more slavishly: see pp. 2-3, 310, 311.
22. Popper, op. cit., II, p. 270. Compare Hindess and Hirst, p. 311.
23. Francis Bacon, *Of the Advancement of Learning* (Everyman edition), p. 132.
24. By 1969 Althusser had narrowed the fully-approved texts to two: the *Critique of the Gotha Programme* (1875) and the *Marginal Notes on Wagner's 'Lehrbuch der politischen Okonomie'* (1880): these alone 'are totally and definitively exempt from any trace of Hegelian influence' (L. & P. 90). See also François George, 'Lire Althusser', *Les temps modernes* (May, 1969).
25. See my 'Open Letter to Leszek Kolakowski', *Socialist Register*, 1973, pp. 18-33.
26. As for example, the chapter, 'Exploitation', in *The Making of the English Working Class*.
27. But this is too generous, since Althusser's 'definition' of empiricism is so slovenly and unlocated, on one hand, and so all-embracing ('rationalist', 'sensualist', and 'Hegelian thought') on the other, as to leave us with only an epithet to attach to any views which he dislikes. See R.C. pp. 35-36.
28. One may take heart from the principled criticism which (after a little delay) American historians visited upon Fogel and Engerman's *Time on the Cross*. The French historical profession (to judge by *Annales E.S.C.* in recent years) has not always offered the same principled defence against the universalist claims of the computer.
29. In its secondary form it is the accepted 'findings' or accumulating knowledge of historians, which is (or ought to be) passed under continuous critical review.
30. Alasdair MacIntyre, 'Breaking the Chains of Reason', in *Out of Apathy* (London, 1960), pp. 219-220.
31. Popper's objections to the 'predictive' character of certain notions of historical 'laws' have force, and are stubbornly argued. Althusser would benefit from reading them.
32. In a blistering chapter ('The Need for a Philosophy of History') in his *Autobiography*, R.G. Collingwood exposed exactly these confusions. 'It was clear to me that any philosopher who offered a theory of 'scientific method', without being in a position to offer a theory of historical method, was defrauding his public by supporting his world on an elephant and hoping that nobody would ask what kept the elephant up' (Pelican, 1944; p. 61).
33. MacIntyre, op. cit., p. 234.
34. See note 15. The argument is little more than a gesture towards a particular French tradition of epistemology and idealist

- structuralism: Bachelard, Cavaillès, Canguilhem and Foucault. See Simon Clarke, 'Althusserian Marxism', Part III, section 1, and R.C. 43-46. It is significant that the only historian commended by Althusser is Foucault, his former pupil, who in his earlier work (work dominated by the concept of the 'episteme'), also gives us history as a subject-less structure, and one in which men and women are obliterated by ideologies.
35. 'Sartre Aujourd'hui', *l'Arc*, no. 30, translated in *Telos*, 9 (1971), pp. 110-116.
 36. One part of this claim has come from authentic efforts to establish 'scientific' procedures of investigation (quantitative, demographic, &c.); the other part has stemmed from academic humbug, as 'social scientists' have sought to maintain parity with scientific colleagues within educational structures (and in the face of grant-awarding bodies) dominated by utilitarian criteria. The older, 'amateurish', notion of History as a disciplined 'Humanity' was always more exact.
 37. J.H. Hexter's 'reality rule' - 'the most likely story that can be sustained by the relevant existing evidence' - is, in itself, a helpful one. Unfortunately it has been put to work by its author in increasingly unhelpful ways, in support of a prior assumption that *any* 'Marxist' story *must* be unlikely.
 38. For a prime example of this misunderstanding, see Hindess and Hirst, op. cit., p. 312.
 39. This does not mean that 'history' may be seen *only* as process. In our time historians - and certainly Marxist historians - have selected process (and attendant questions of relationship and causation) as the supreme object of enquiry. There are other legitimate ways of interrogating the evidence.
 40. Leszek Kolakowski, 'Historical Understanding and the Intelligibility of History', *Tri-Quarterly*, 22, Fall 1971, pp. 103-117. I have offered a qualification to this argument in my 'Open Letter to Kolakowski.'
 41. See Sartre's interesting distinction between the 'notion' and the 'concept', cited below, p.148. But, notwithstanding this, I will continue to use both terms.
 42. By 'concepts' (or notions) I mean general categories - of class, ideology, the nation-state, feudalism, &c., or specific historical forms and sequences, as crisis of subsistence, familial development cycle, &c. - and by 'hypotheses' I mean the conceptual organisation of the evidence to explain particular episodes of causation and relationship.
 43. One helpful elucidation of these procedures is in E.J. Hobsbawm, 'Karl Marx's Contribution to Historiography', in R. Blackburn (ed.), *Ideology in Social Science* (1972).

44. For which we are particularly indebted to French historical demography.
45. I have recently re-stated my position in 'Eighteenth-Century English Society: Class Struggle without Class?', *Social History*, III, no. 2 (May, 1978). See also E.J. Hobsbawm, 'Class Consciousness in History', in I. Meszaros (ed.), *Aspects of History and Class Consciousness* (1971), and C. Castoriadis, 'On the History of the Workers' Movement', *Telos*, 30, Winter 1976-77.
46. Such static 'models' may of course play a useful part in certain kinds of investigation.
47. The problem of 'gaps' in the evidence as to ancient societies is discussed in M.I. Finley, *The Use and Abuse of History* (1971), pp. 69-71.
48. See Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature*, and the important chapter on 'Determination'.
49. *F.M.*, pp. 117-128, discussed below, pp. 278-80.
50. Cf. Anon, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p. 11: 'Class is defined by men as they live their own history, and, in the end, this is its only definition.'
51. *Capital* (1938), p. xviii.
52. It is significant that Althusser passes over the most serious epistemological error of Engels ('reflection theory') without any critique. For critique would have involved him in (a) a consideration of the whole problem of 'dialogue', (b) in a consequent critique of Lenin (see note 6), and (c) in a self-critique which must have led on to a self-destruct, since his own epistemology (with Generalities I arising unbidden and unexamined) is a kind of 'theoreticist' reflection-theory, reproduced in idealist form.
53. *Grundrisse*, p. 461.
54. Book I of *Capital* ('Capitalist Production') of course appeared in advance of Books II and III, and was sub-titled, in the English edition edited by Engels, 'A Critical Analysis of Capitalist Production.'
55. When I made this self-evident point in 1965 I was sternly rebuked for my 'incredibly impoverished vision of Marx's work': Perry Anderson, 'Socialism and Pseudo-Empiricism', *New Left Review*, 35 (January-February 1966), p. 21. I had not then read the *Grundrisse*. The point is surely now established beyond any reach of argument?
56. Marx to Lassalle, 22 February 1858: 'The thing makes very slow progress because as soon as one tries to come to a final reckoning with questions which one has made the chief object of one's studies for years, they are always revealing new aspects and demanding fresh consideration.' (*Selected Correspondence*, p. 224). But seven

- years before Marx had assured Engels that 'in five weeks I will be through with the whole economic shit.' He would then throw himself 'into a new science . . . I am beginning to be tired of it.' Cited in David McLellan, *Karl Marx, His Life and Thought* (1973), p. 283.
57. I am of course aware that this is a contentious area in which a hundred books and theses have been deployed. I am only reporting my own considered conclusion. Althusser also sees *Capital* as a work of Political Economy (Marxist Science), although he sees this as a merit: 'the theory of Political Economy, of which *Capital* is an example . . . considers one relatively autonomous component of the social totality' (R.C. 109). He also allows that, if chapter one of *Capital* is not read in *his sense*, it would be 'an essentially Hegelian work' (R.C. 125-126). He repeatedly insists that the object of *Capital* is neither theory nor social formations, but the capitalist mode of production (e.g. *L. & P.* 76, cited above, p. 214; *P. & H.*, p. 186). Colletti sees the problem (Is Marx making a critique of bourgeois Political Economy, or is he criticising Political Economy as such?) as remaining unresolved: 'Interview', *New Left Review*, 86 (July-August 1975), pp. 17-18; Castoriadis, examining much the same problem, flatly concludes that Marxist economic theory is untenable: 'Interview', *Telos*, 23 (1975) esp. pp. 143-149.
58. *Grundrisse*, p. 459. My italics.
59. *C.W.*, I, p. 510.
60. *Grundrisse*, p. 276. Roman Rosdolsky, *The Making of Marx's "Capital"* (London, 1977) has made a definitive analysis of the Hegelian structure of the *Grundrisse* and of the central status of the concept of 'capital in general', a status which remains central in *Capital*. The question arises throughout, but see especially pp. 41-52, 367-8, and his correct emphasis (p. 493) that 'the model of a pure capitalist society in Marx's work . . . represented a heuristic device, intended to help in the illustration of the developmental tendencies of the capitalist mode of production, free from "all disturbing accompanying circumstances." See also I.L. Rubin, *Essays on Marx's Theory of Value* (Detroit, 1972), p. 117.
61. *Ibid.* p. 278. Such passages are licences for Althusser's view of history is a 'process without a subject.'
62. *Ibid.*, p. 101. There is of course now an immense literature on the Hegel-Marx relationship. Althusser's attempt to deny the Hegelian influence upon *Capital* has not survived it. For my purposes I wish to stress the strong and continuing Hegelian influence in these critical years: for 1857-8, see McLellan, *op. cit.*, p. 304; for circa 1861-2 see 'Marx's Précis of Hegel's Doctrine of Being in the Minor Logic', *International Review of Social History*, XXII, 3, 1977; and also

- T. Carver, 'Marx and Hegel's *Logic*', *Political Studies*, XXII, 1976, and Rosdolsky, op. cit., passim.
63. See e.g. Anderson, 'Socialism and Pseudo-Empiricism', pp. 19–21.
 64. When Gareth Stedman Jones, 'Engels and the End of Classical German Philosophy', *New Left Review*, 79, (May–June 1973), refers (p. 25) to 'the Darwinist laws of evolution', it is not clear to me which *laws* are being referred to; although it is true that Engels, in *Dialectics of Nature*, saw evolutionary process as exemplifying dialectical laws: as Darwin did not.
 65. *Selected Correspondence*, pp. 125–126. My italics. Engels had previously written to Marx that Darwin had 'finished off' teleology, and spoke of his 'magnificent attempt ... to demonstrate historical development in nature.'
 66. *Ibid.*, p. 198. McLellan, for some reason, renders Marx's 'death-blow' to teleology as a blow to 'religious teleology' (which Marx does *not* say). But he also usefully documents Marx's subsequent criticisms of Darwin, pp. 423–24. These vary from comments on the ideological intrusion of notions of competition ('Hobbes's "bellum omnium contra omnes"') to the (very different) complaint that 'in Darwin progress is merely accidental.' Lawrence Krader is the only authority known to me who has made a scholarly and exact definition of the point at issue: 'The opposite of a teleological, directed law of nature and man attracted Marx to the conceptions of Darwin': see *The Ethnological Notebooks of Karl Marx* (Assen, 1974), esp. pp. 82–85, also pp. 2, 354–355, 392–393. While Engels certainly employed more unconsidered analogies between natural evolution and historical process than did Marx, the attempt of many recent Marxologists to dissociate Marx from their common admiration of Darwin is absurd.
 67. See Gerrattana's helpful (but over-reverent) essay, 'Marx and Darwin', *New Left Review*, 82 (November–December 1973), pp. 79–80. However, the supposition that Marx had wished to dedicate a volume of *Capital* to Darwin has now been shown to be in error. (Darwin's correspondent, on that occasion, was Edward Aveling.) See Margaret A. Fay, 'Did Marx offer to dedicate *Capital* to Darwin?', *Journal of History of Ideas*, XXXIX, January–March, 1978; and *Annals of Science*, XXXIII, 1976.
 68. Thus Marx's reminder to himself, at one point in the *Grundrisse*, 'to correct the idealist manner of this analysis.'
 69. Nicolaus (*Grundrisse*, p. 60) follows Rosdolsky here. Since Rosdolsky's work has been acclaimed in some quarters as definitive, it is necessary to make a critical comment on his very serious and scrupulous study. His discussion of the whole question of the

- historical dimension of *Capital* is confined to one footnote (p. 25, note 56), dismissive of the phrase 'turn everything round', and to brief discussions of primitive accumulation in which Marx's historical and empirical analyses are commended for 'liveliness and persuasiveness' (p. 61) but scarcely considered further. In short, Rosdolsky shows little interest in historical materialism, sees the Hegelian structure ('capital in general') of *Capital* as always a merit, and hence does less than justice to critics (including Marxist critics): notably to Rosa Luxemburg. I am not competent to comment on Rosdolsky's status as an economic theorist; but one must regret that he can see *Capital* only as a heuristic academic exercise in economic theory, that his study contains *no* discussion of Darwin or of the intellectual and political context more generally. In short, it is a serious but profoundly ahistorical work.
70. As Rosa Luxemburg wrote in a private letter from prison: 'the famed Volume I of *Capital* with its Hegelian Rococo ornamentation is quite abhorrent to me': *Briefe an Freunde*, p. 85, cited Rosdolsky, pp. 492–3. As Althusser exalts exactly these 'Rococo' elements into 'Science' I find myself coming to share Luxemburg's abhorrence of them.
 71. Thus Balibar (*R.C.*, p. 202) declares that *Capital* sets the 'hypothesis' of historical materialism to work 'and *verifies* it against the example of the capitalist social formation.' A good example of Balibar's general nonsense. A historical hypothesis could only be 'verified' in historical investigation: and (as he and Althusser repeat *ad nauseam*) *Capital's* object is the capitalist mode of production and not 'the capitalist social formation.'
 72. The 'historical' chapters of *Capital* have inevitably had a stronger formative influence upon the British tradition of Marxist historiography than that of any other country; and for the same reason, a slavish adoption of Marx's hypotheses was replaced fairly early by a critical apprenticeship to them. An interesting case is the suggestive final chapter of Volume One on 'Primitive Accumulation', which raised questions which were re-examined by M.H. Dobb, *Studies in the Development of Capitalism* (1946), which in turn gave rise to controversies which are resumed and discussed by John Saville, *Socialist Register*, 1969. But Saville's discussion leaves open areas (accumulation through 'colonial plunder') which are being re-opened from several directions (Wallerstein, Perry Anderson, and Indian Marxist historians such as Irfan Habib), who demand renewed attention to Britain's imperial and colonial role. The point is that they are those hypotheses of Marx which are most alive which continue to undergo interrogation and revision.

73. Marx was himself, on occasion, careful to indicate the limits of this structure. Thus *Capital*, Volume Three (Chicago, 1909), p. 37, commences by speaking of 'the life circle of capital', and characterises Volume One as an analysis of the capitalist productive process 'without regard to any secondary influences of conditions outside it.' On p. 968: '... the actual movements of competition belong outside of our plan ... because we have to present only the internal organization of the capitalist mode of production, as it were, in its ideal average.' And so on. On other occasions he was less careful.
74. Ben Fine and Laurence Harris, 'Controversial Issues in Marxist Economic Theory', *Socialist Register*, 1976, p. 141.
75. One must also note Sebastiano Timpanaro's defence of Engels, *On Materialism* (New Left Books, 1976).
76. In any case, the positivist credentials of the natural sciences have themselves long been at the centre of controversy – a controversy which Caudwell anticipated in *The Crisis in Physics* and in *Further Studies in a Dying Culture*.
77. In my *William Morris, Romantic to Revolutionary* (Merlin Press, revised edition, 1977).
78. See E.J. Hobsbawm, 'From Social History to the History of Society', *Daedalus*, 100 (1971), esp. pp. 31–32.
79. Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* (Fontana, 1973), p. 260.
80. I have challenged this notation in the Postscript to my revised *William Morris*. It is also challenged, in even wider terms, by M.-H. Abensour, 'Les Formes de L'Utopie Socialiste-Communiste' (thèse pour le Doctorat d'Etat en Science politique, Paris, 1973).
81. One characteristic of '1956' was the resurgence among Communist 'revisionists' of a voluntarist vocabulary – notably Poland, Hungary, but also throughout the world movement. The various oppositions of 1956 were often led by militants whose sensibility had been formed in the decade 1936–46. A similar expression of 'rebellion against fact' was evinced in the British Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. It is obligatory today to deplore the supposed 'moralism' of this movement, although that 'moralism' did more to exert a presence and to shift the terms of politics in this country than has anything in the subsequent fifteen years of Marxist 'revival.'
82. I have discussed this phenomenon in 'Outside the Whale', *Out of Apathy* (1960).
83. Neil J. Smelser, *Social Change in the Industrial Revolution* (1959), p. 180.
84. *Ibid.*, pp. 11, 16, et passim.

85. In its less pretentious chapters, Smelser's book did raise interesting questions as to the changing inter-relations between the organisation of work in the cotton industry and the family structure of the operatives.
86. In view of Alvin Gouldner's analysis of the genesis of Parsonian structuralism (*The Coming Crisis in Western Sociology*) I should make it clear that I do not mean that this thought was genetically the product of Cold War stasis: Gouldner is exactly right to place the critical experiential matrix in an earlier context. I mean that the ascendancy of Parsonianism as *ideology*, with massive academic and institutional support, was so.
87. J.V. Stalin, *Marxism and Linguistics* (1950), reprinted in Bruce Franklin (ed.), *The Essential Stalin*, (1973), pp. 407–409, 411.
88. There is another reverent reference to Stalin on linguistics in *R.C.* 133.
89. *Essays*, 125 et passim. See also the Preface to the Italian edition of *R.C.* Ardent theoretical practitioners suppose that Althusser's 'self-criticisms' remove all possible difficulties in *F.M.* and *R.C.* While I have noted these criticisms, they are either (a) marginal and so qualified as to constitute rhetorical (rather than intellectual) negotiations, or (b) so large that, if taken seriously, they call in question the earlier work *in toto*. We are thus entitled to take *F.M.* and *R.C.* as the most elaborated and most influential part of the Althusserian corpus. The subsequent writings are, generally, brutalised versions of the earlier, and are largely to be distinguished by the 'militant' and 'revolutionary' posturing demanded by his Office as the leading philosopher of the P.C.F.
90. M.H. Fisch and T.G. Bergin (eds.), *The Autobiography of Giambattista Vico* (New York, 1944), p. 171.
91. G. Vico, *The New Science* (New York, 1948), passim, esp. paras 141, 347, 161, 349.
92. I say the objections may be upheld only 'sometimes', since on some occasions, when the isolates of economic theory are in question, the notion is valid, and on other occasions it can be seen that 'law' is being used metaphorically, as 'logic', direction, or tendency. But this cannot excuse Marx's reference, as in his first Preface to *Capital*, to 'the natural laws of capitalist production ... tendencies working with iron necessity towards inevitable results.' How is it possible for Marxist 'scholars' to *then* accuse Engels of 'positivism' and to exonerate Marx of all blame?
93. 'An Open Letter to Leszek Kolakowski', above, p. 120.
94. *The New Science*, p. 382 (para. 1108).
95. *F.M.*, pp. 117–128.

96. Thus he commences his 'reading' (F.M. 117–118) by making a wholly unwarranted translation of Engels's 'accidents' into 'super-structures'!! (See *Selected Correspondence*, p. 475.)
97. Engels uses the same paradigm of individuals/history in the analogous passage of *Ludwig Feuerbach* (Martin Lawrence, n.d.), p. 58.
98. William Morris, *The Dream of John Ball* (1886).
99. See my 'Letter to Kolakowski', above, pp. 131–155.
100. This was dealt with by P. Vilar, 'Histoire marxiste, histoire en construction. Essai de dialogue avec Althusser', *Annales E.S.C.*, 1973, englished in *New Left Review*, 80 (July–August 1973). I must say that (these comments apart) I found Vilar's rejoinder to be altogether too deferential.
101. See Kolakowski, 'Althusser's Marx', p. 127: 'Althusser often formulates a general statement and then quotes it later and then refers to it by saying "we showed" or "it was proved."'
102. *Telos*, 9 (1971), p. 110.
103. 'Determination' does not even appear in the 'Glossary' to F.M. and R.C. although 'overdetermination' does!
104. See my *Whigs and Hunters* (1976), esp. the final section.
105. Sartre, op. cit., p. 112.
106. Hindess and Hirst at least notice this (*Pre-Capitalist Modes of Production*, chapter 6), and offer alternative verbal arrangements. But since their productions are manufactured from an even more rarefied air – a scholasticism parasitic upon a scholasticism – we need follow them no further.
107. See McLellan, op. cit., p. 437.
108. I notice that I use it myself in 'Peculiarities of the English', above, p. 85.
109. See Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society*, Conclusion, and *Keywords* (1976): 'In most of its uses *masses* is a cant word ...' This is certainly true of Althusser's use in his polemic with Lewis.
110. *Essays*, pp. 49–50. For a restatement of my own views, see note 45 above.
111. See the pertinent comments of Raoul Makarius on Lévi-Strauss in 'Structuralism – Science or Ideology?', *Socialist Register*, 1974.
112. Sartre, op. cit., p. 114.
113. Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* ('Determination') and also *Keywords*, pp. 87–91.
114. *Marxism and Literature*, pp. 80–81.
115. Engels, review of Marx's *Critique of Political Economy*, in *Selected Works*, I, pp. 370–1.

116. As far as I am concerned, Jeff Coulter's excellent study, 'Marxism and the Engels Paradox', *Socialist Register*, 1971, settles that question. The logical critique of Engels's *Naturdialektik* is, as far as it goes, sound; and it has been resumed, in somewhat similar ways, by K. Popper, 'What is Dialectic?', *Conjectures and Refutations* (1963), by Colletti in *Marxism and Hegel*, and by G. Stedman Jones, 'Engels and the End of Classical German Philosophy', *New Left Review* (May–June 1973) – which follows Colletti. But all then throw out the baby ('the conscious interception of the object in its process of development') along with the Hegelian bathwater: see Coulter, pp. 129–132, 137–141.
117. Cited in *Grundrisse*, p. 60.
118. I am not competent to say whether Zeeman's 'catastrophe theory' in mathematics (the first cousin to logic) affords a new point of entry into the problem.
119. Althusser's distrust of dialectics follows, once again, contemporary fashion; as Coulter remarks (p. 143, citing G. Pask, *An Approach to Cybernetics* 1963); cybernetic considerations have prevailed over notions of 'dialectical leap', especially in those disciplines concerned with 'structures with finite variables entering into definable states of internal organization': i.e. structuralisms.
120. *Selected Correspondence*, p. 475. I don't know how Althusser gets *factor* out of *element* ('*Moment*') (since I haven't checked back on French translations), but it consorts well with his antique factorial notion of history: F.M. 111–2; Althusser, *Pour Marx* (Paris, 1966), p. 111: 'La production est le facteur déterminant, &c.'
121. N. Poulantzas, *Political Power and Social Classes* (New Left Books, 1973), pp. 13–15.
122. A. Glucksmann, 'A Ventriloquist Structuralism', *New Left Review*, 72 (March–April 1972), originally published in *Les temps modernes*, 1967.
123. I have discussed the experiential basis of these beliefs in *The Making of the English Working Class*, chapter 16, sections 3 & 4.
124. But only *in this sense*. It is in the context of this polemic that Marx's famous epigram arises ('The hand-mill gives you society with the feudal lord; the steam-mill, society with the industrial capitalist': C.W. VI, 166) – an aphorism which has been taken as licence for technological determinism: the productive forces 'give you' society (Stalin – but also, in the last instance, Althusser, Balibar, Poulantzas). But the proposition can only be understood as a counter-proposition to Proudhon, for whom the division of labour proceeds from the idea ('I propose') in a rational serial to the workshop and thence to the machines: see esp. C.W. VI,

- pp. 178–190 and *Selected Correspondence*, p. 10 (this whole letter to Annenkov in 1846 is a superb summary of *The Poverty of Philosophy*).
125. *Essays*, p. 124 note 8: where Althusser bets on Lewis's 'weakness for Jean-Paul Sartre.' But maybe this was not a joke: perhaps Althusser is one of those who believes that no Englishman could get any ideas, however bad, unless from a French philosopher.
 126. 'The Great Moral Muddle', *Modern Quarterly*, I, 4 (Autumn 1946); 'Marxism and Ethics', *ibid.*, V, 3 (Summer 1950); 'The Moral Complexion of Our People', VI, I (winter, 1950–1); 'Science and Religion', VIII, 4 (Autumn, 1953).
 127. Arnold Kettle, 'Rebels and Causes', *Marxism Today*, March 1958.
 128. In the Glossary to the English edition of *R.C.*, which suggests that 'the ideology of a socialist society may be . . . a proletarian "class humanism"', Althusser condescends to interpolate a proviso: 'an expression I obviously use in a provisional, half-critical sense.' p. 314.
 129. I shall republish a revised and shortened version of this in *Reasoning*, Vol. II.
 130. *New Reasoner*, 7 (Winter 1958–9), pp. 143–148.
 131. V. Ozerov, 'About Proletarian Humanism and Abstract Moralizing', *Novy Mir*, 6, 1958, extracted in *New Reasoner*, 9, (Summer 1959), pp. 147–8.
 132. Anon., *The German Ideology*.
 133. In return, the Central Committee of the P.C.F. passed in 1966, a special proviso permitting Party philosophers to publish their work without Party supervision.
 134. I have not attempted to sketch the full and complex history. An early consequence of Althusserian influence was expressed in a Maoist freak-out among his student following; then Althusser's conservative posture during the May events, 1968, led to secessions and Althusserian heresies. And so on. These bits of theatre were predictable. Some part of the story is to be found in the lively apostasies of Jacques Rancière, *La leçon d'Althusser* (Gallimard, 1974); Rancière, 'On the theory of Ideology', *Radical Philosophy*, 7 (Spring 1974); and in Simon Clarke, 'Althusserian Marxism.'
 135. In the Introduction to *Reasoning*, Volume II.
 136. See Althusser's introduction to Dominique Lecourt, *The Case of Lysenko*, (New Left Books, 1977).
 137. In *Essays*, p. 77, Althusser went so far as to write that 'the national mass movement of the Czech people . . . merits the respect and support of all Communists', exactly as 'the "humanist" philosophies of western intellectuals (at ease in their academic chairs or

- wherever)' merited their criticism. Where, then, has Althusser been sitting, these last few years? And why should the same phenomenon merit the respect of Communists, but (if 'Marxist humanists' should respect it) it must call for criticism?
138. Peter Fryer, 'Lenin as Philosopher', *Labour Review*, September–October, 1957.
 139. By 1975, when, in a curious piece of theatre, Althusser defended his doctoral 'thesis' at Amiens, his language, as reported in *Le Monde*, had become even uglier: 'I would never have written anything were it not for the 20th Congress and Khrushchev's critique of Stalinism and the subsequent liberalisation . . . My target was therefore clear: these humanist ravings, these feeble dissertations on liberty, labour or alienation which were the effects of all this among French Party intellectuals': *Radical Philosophy*, 12 (Winter 1975).
 140. 'Through the Smoke of Budapest', *The Reasoner*, 3 (November 1956), reprinted in part in David Widgery, *The Left in Britain* (Penguin, 1976), pp. 66–72.
 141. 'Socialist Humanism', *New Reasoner*, 1 (Summer 1957), p. 107.
 142. *Ibid.*, p. 137.
 143. It is the more surprising that anthropological work of vitality and originality has emerged from within the sphere of Althusserian influence. Possibly Althusser's ambiguous redefinition of the 'economic' (see p. 197) gave back to French Marxist anthropologists a little space for movement. It must also be remembered that anthropology finds it easier to co-habit with a structuralism than does history. In any event, Godelier at least has fought his way stubbornly out of the orrery; and he *knows why*.
 144. Thus John Mepham, 'Who Makes History?', *Radical Philosophy*, 6 (winter 1973) declares that, if you suppose that 'men make history', then 'you would need to know their subjective states, beliefs, attitudes, prejudices, etc. This is how Political Economy thought about men. And also empiricist philosophy, utilitarianism etc.' So why did Dickens create Mr. Gradgrind?
 145. *Capital*, III (1909), pp. 102–103.
 146. *Capital*, I (1938), p. xix. My italics.
 147. Among others who have drawn attention to the coincidence between Althusserian thought and structural-functionalism are Dale Tomich in *Radical America*, III, 5 (1969) and IV, 6 (1970); Simon Clarke, 'Marxism, Sociology and Poulantzas' Theory of the State', *Capital and Class* (Summer 1977).
 148. These (Lacanian) notions are found, in their most ridiculous version, in *L. & P.*, pp. 160–170, in the theory of ideological inter-

pellation. More recently, Ernesto Laclau (*Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory*, New Left Books, 1977, chapters 3 & 4), has sought to put this fairy-story to use. That Laclau occasionally appears to be more sensible than Althusser does not arise from any improvement in 'theory' but from the fact that he starts off with rather more information about the real world. No doubt he will be embarrassed by this accusation – since he tells us that 'modern epistemology asserts' (!!!) that 'the "concrete facts" are produced by the theory or problematic itself' (p. 59) – but in fact he *does* know a little about Fascism, Populism, &c. He remains a kangaroo, but one who settles for longer periods and sniffs the real grass before he bounds off into the theoretical elements.

149. In case it should be supposed that this term has élitist connotations, I must note that it is a social category to be found thickest on the ground in Oxford, Cambridge, Paris, London, &c.
150. Marx's sixth thesis on Feuerbach declared that 'the human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the *ensemble* of the social relations.' Mephram (see note 144) reports that 'Marx's formulation' was that 'men are "ensembles of social relations"! How is one to keep up with mis-readings of this order?
151. This is discussed by (among others) Norman Geras, 'Althusserian Marxism', *New Left Review*, 71 (January–February, 1971); Geras, 'Marx and the Critique of Political Economy', in *Ideology and Social Science*.
152. It is true that Marx sometimes appears to gesture towards a larger claim, notably in chapter XLVIII of *Capital*, III ('The Trinitarian Formula'). This chapter, which is especially beloved by theoretical practitioners, was composed of three different fragments (in fact, three different unfinished attempts to write the same thing) which Engels found among Marx's papers. We may leave to Marxologists the question as to the status to be afforded to such fragments. I find them suggestive, but they also provide renewed evidence as to Marx's entrapment within the anti-structure of Political Economy: capital is seen as 'a perennial pumping machine of surplus labour' (p. 957) which (if we forget that the resistance of labour is continually gumming up the pump) gives us another motor for an orrery.
153. See e.g. Gareth Stedman Jones, 'History: the Poverty of Empiricism', in *Ideology and Social Science*, p. 107.
154. *Marxism and Literature*, pp. 91–92.
155. Simon Clarke, 'Althusserian Marxism', p. 54. See note 13.
156. This is another of Althusser's special licences for structuralism (*Capital*, III, p. 919), arising in a highly-condensed discussion of

- feudal 'labour rent'. See the discussion in Clark, op. cit.
157. See Maurice Godelier's significant re-statement, 'La Part Idéelle du Réel', forthcoming.
158. Raymond Williams, op. cit., p. 92.
159. Marx to Annenkov, 28 December 1846, *Selected Correspondence*, p. 9.
160. Cited in D. McLellan, *Marx before Marxism* (Penguin, 1972), p. 280. My italics. Korsch long ago argued that Marxist Political Economy and 'the "subjective" description of history as a class struggle' were 'two independent forms of Marxist thought, equally original and not derived one from the other . . .': Karl Korsch, *Karl Marx* (London, 1938), pp. 228–9.
161. Gareth Stedman Jones: 'Engels and the Genesis of Marxism', *New Left Review*, 106 (November–December 1977).
162. As Jones shows (above), Engels was very much too modest. One may hazard that his extreme generosity to his friend was prompted by the fact that Marx had died only three months previously. In a subsequent note (to the new German edition of 1890) he was more just to himself.
163. Althusser returns constantly to this moment of Marx's theoretical (and Hegelian) immobilism: in an index to Marx's work in R.C. the longest entry is to the '1857' Introduction, the next longest to the Preface to the *Critique*.
164. See L. Krader, op. cit.
165. Terry Eagleton, *Criticism and Ideology* (New Left Books, 1976), p. 61.
166. Gareth Stedman Jones, 'Engels and the End of Classical German Philosophy', op. cit., p. 31. One must add that the author has increasingly overcome this idealist legacy in his subsequent work.
167. Cornelius Castoriadis, *L'expérience du mouvement ouvrier* (Paris, 1974); *La société bureaucratique* (Paris, 1973); *L'institution imaginaire de la société* (Paris, 1975); *Les Carrefours du labyrinthe* (Paris, 1978). In recent years the journal *Telos* has presented some of the work of Castoriadis and of Claude Lefort to an English-speaking public. Unfortunately I am unable to recommend the account of their work by an American enthusiast, Dick Howard, *The Marxian Legacy* (London, 1977). Howard's study is an extraordinary essay in ahistorical and apolitical weightlessness, which reduces everything to an interminable North American post-New-Left academic seminar in something which he calls (inaccurately) 'ontology'. Castoriadis has never been engaged in academicisms of this kind. The English 'Solidarity' group has published some pertinent extracts from Castoriadis ('Paul Cardan') in pamphlet form:

- 'Solidarity', c/o 123 Lathom Road, London E.6. Notably *Modern Capitalism and Revolution* (75p) and *History and Revolution* (20p). The latter pamphlet is twenty pennyworth of the best emetic to prescribe to Marxist theologians and theoretical practitioners – a sectarian emetic to be administered only to sectarians.
168. I find helpful James Henretta, 'Social History as Lived and Written' (Newberry Library, Chicago, 1977). I find actively unhelpful recent attempts to suggest a rupture in British Marxist historiography between the work of Maurice Dobb, and the historiography of the 1960s (including the work by myself and Eugene Genovese). I see on *both* sides of this supposed 'break' a *common* tradition of Marxist historiography submitted to an empirical discourse (albeit with differing emphases); and 'culturalism' is a term which I refuse: see R. Johnson, G. McLennan, B. Schwarz, *Economy, Culture and Concept* (Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, Birmingham University, 1978).
 169. Krader, op. cit., pp. 39, 329.
 170. 'La conscience est plutôt un réseau d'intentions significatives, tantôt claires pour elles-mêmes, tantôt au contraire vécues plutôt que connues': *La structure du comportement* (Paris, 1942). See also James Miller, 'Merleau-Ponty's Marxism', *History and Theory*, XV, (1976).
 171. I have argued this again recently in my Postscript to *William Morris*. It has long been a theme of Castoriadis's flanking attacks on Marxist theory and organisation: see e.g. 'On the History of the Workers' Movement', *Telos*, 30, Winter 1967–77. Agnes Heller, *The Theory of Need in Marx* (1976) deploys some of the materials for the necessary argument, but see also the thoughtful criticisms by Kate Soper, *Radical Philosophy*, 17, Summer 1977, pp. 37–42.
 172. Tony Skillen, 'Marxism and Morality', *Radical Philosophy*, 8, Summer 1974.
 173. Andrew Collier, 'The Production of Moral Ideology', *Radical Philosophy*, 9, 1974.
 174. A very much more serious critique was commenced by Philip Corrigan and Derek Sayer, 'Moral Relations, Political Economy and Class Struggle', *Radical Philosophy*, 12, Winter 1975, which starts excellently but then becomes dispersed, perhaps because the authors were unwilling to press their critique so far as to recognise the 'silence' in Marx.
 175. Skillen, op. cit.
 176. An empty phrase which Anderson can still fall back upon in his self-critical *Considerations on Western Marxism*, p. 103.
 177. But the Trotskyisms have rarely offered 'Theory' in such preten-

- tious and mystifying ways. More often they represent a more old-fashioned return to a notional purified Leninism, which, while usually 'economistic', often inept, and always stridently self-righteous, is at least redeemed by some political activity, in the course of which the 'cadres' learn a good deal, and often learn enough to carry them out of their own self-enclosed sects.
178. In certain hands, the Gramscian concept of 'hegemony' can induce the same pessimistic determinism, as can Marcusean notions of the co-optation of the working class and of its organisations; so also can certain theoreticised notions of patriarchal and male domination, which – although sometimes presented by feminist writers – end up by depreciating women's presence, and by confiscating their historical identity.
 179. Enzensberger, op. cit., pp. 276–7.
 180. One recalls, with anxiety, that some of the leading cadres of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia received their training in 'Marxism' in Paris in the 1960s.
 181. See my *William Morris* (1977 edn.), p. 761.
 182. I apologise. In copying this extract from *Hard Times* I mistook the name of Mr Gradgrind for M. Althusser.
 183. Anderson, 'Socialism and Pseudo-Empiricism', p. 39.

AFTERNOTE

The text of *The Poverty of Theory* was completed in February 1978. In March the Union of the Left was defeated in the French elections. At the end of April Althusser published four articles in *Le Monde*, polemicising against the leadership of the French Communist Party. These have subsequently been republished by Maspero (*Ce qui ne peut durer dans le parti communiste français*), and englished in *New Left Review*, 109, May-June 1978.

These articles have been variously presented in different organs of the British Left, as a 'dramatic and eloquent intervention', and as the 'devastating' pronouncements of a 'non-dogmatic' and 'supple' Marxist. Althusser has become a new 'anti-Stalinist' culture-hero of the francophile British intelligentsia, and I have shown my usual ineptitude in choosing this moment to publish my critique.

Unfortunately I have not been able to obtain these 'eloquent' and 'devastating' articles. They have not yet reached me at Worcester. The articles which I have read were given up to the kind of political in-fighting predictable in the aftermath of a lamentable political defeat – a defeat ensured by the double-talk, double-tactics, and unabashed opportunism of the PCF. One is given the impression that, if the Union of the Left had won 2% more of the poll, M. Althusser would have denied the world the benefit of his views. But defeat, repeating the experience of promise deferred which has become perpetual to generations of the French Left, has unloosed a squall of dismay, in which Althusser must either raise his voice above the others, or be consigned to nullity.

It would have been more impressive if Althusser's critique

(and in particular, his recommendation of joint action of the Left at the 'base') had been issued *before* the defeat, and in time to have influenced the campaign. It is, after all, rather familiar for unsuccessful politicians to find themselves exposed to retribution in the aftermath of defeat – and Althusser and his friends are playing the part of Mrs Thatcher to the Edward Heath of Marchais.

What distinguishes Althusser's polemics is not their eloquence but their self-righteous tone and their utter lack of self-criticism. The Political Committee of the PCF is held responsible for all – for the Party's history, its strategies, and its ideology. The polemic is sharp, and sometimes caustic, in its exposure of the Party's bureaucratic organisation and quasi-military control. But this is, after all, a very old story, and one profoundly familiar to anyone with a practical (as opposed to theoretic) knowledge of the French Left. It has been written out, over several decades, by many hands: by Trotskyists and syndicalists, by the Communist oppositions of 1956 and subsequently, by Sartre at large in the late 1950s, by our comrades of the first Nouvelle Gauche, of *France-Observateur* and the U.G.S., by *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, by the activists of May 1968, and by many others. Throughout these decades, Althusser has refused any permissibility to this critique, and, as we have seen, has denounced it as 'the most violent bourgeois anti-Communism and Trotskyist anti-Stalinism.'

No doubt we should admire his 'supple', even agile, Marxism. He has been able to move from 'the cult of the personality' (1965) to 'a Stalinian deviation' (1973) to a quite explicit dissent from Stalinist theory and forms – and all this in less than twenty years! We should perhaps welcome Althusser as a late developer, a philosopher innocent of practical political knowledge who has at length been enlightened by an electoral *débauche* in the classic arena of bourgeois democracy. But to what practical conclusions does this polemic lead? With much courting of the 'militants of the base', he calls for 'a thorough critique and reform of the Party's internal organisation.' Very good. And in what should such a reform consist? Rather little,

perhaps, for Althusser insists that 'democratic centralism' must be sacrosanct: the 'militants' and the 'masses' need no advice from 'experts in bourgeois democracy – be they Communist or not.' This is a pre-emptive strike: Communist critics are forewarned that if they propose reforms which are not to Althusser's taste, he will enter their names in the Black Book of Bourgeois Democracy. For the rest, we are offered a delphic inscrutability. My friend Douglas Johnson, who is rumoured to have private information, tells us (*New Statesman*, 7 July 1978) that Althusser's proposed reforms would be of extensive reach: 'Discussion should be possible within the cells. A militant should be able to write to the Central Committee and have the right to a reply.' I must remember to propose such devastating reforms in the cell of my local Labour Party.

What gives more pause for thought is Althusser's third article (*Le Monde*, 26 April) on 'Ideology.' Here he demands 'a Marxist theory brought back to life: one that is not hardened and deformed by consecrated formulae, but lucid, critical and rigorous.' And he carefully explains that such a theory must be accompanied by *concrete analysis*! And, more than this, by *concrete analysis of class relations*! How very remarkable! And how remarkable, also, that he can intone these platitudes without a single tremor of self-criticism! For two decades Althusser and his immediate circle have had more influence upon the ideology of French Communist intellectuals than any other group. And this influence can be seen, precisely, in the reduction of Marxism to elaborate consecrated formulae, in the abject divorce (under the blanket attack of 'empiricism') between 'theory' and concrete analysis, and in the reduction of the analysis of class relations to metaphysical permutations. So that the first requisite of a critique of the ideology of the PCF must be a rigorous and unforgiving critique of Althusser's works themselves.

I borrow the term 'unforgiving' from Althusser. He tells us that concrete analysis, and also theory, 'do not forgive.' But the necessary critique of the theory and practices of the PCF will turn out to be very much less forgiving than he supposes. For

the PCF was, for many years, the major bastion of Stalinism in the non-Communist world, and its leaders had unusual positions of influence within the counsels of the Comintern.

It is true that Althusser takes a step towards honesty, when he admits that ('between 1948 and 1965') the PCF held its own faked 'trials' of critics and intimidated and blackballed independent sections of the French Left with campaigns of calumny. But, cheek by jowl with this, he twice invokes the memory of Maurice Thorez, and a supposed Golden Age of vital theory and honest practice. This is a useful demagogic trick to pass on the 'militants', in whose memory Thorez is indelibly identified with the great mass anti-fascist struggles of the 1930s. But does not Althusser also know that Thorez (the Moscow exile of the Resistance) was a major engineer of Stalinism within the Comintern, the architect of that subordination of the International to Soviet interests, and of those structures, practices and ideology which *now* (in 1978) Althusser can at last identify as Stalinist? Does he not know that, according to the testimony of two members of the Central Committee of the PCF of that time (*Politique Hebdo*, Spring 1976; *Socialist Register*, 1976), in 1956 Thorez attempted to suppress from his own members any knowledge of Khrushchev's secret report to the 20th Congress, and was associated with Molotov, Malenkov and Kaganovitch in their attempt to overthrow Khrushchev in a *coup*? Althusser is a signatory to the appeal for the clearing of the name of Bukharin, and this does him credit. No doubt he will be interested to learn that, when Khrushchev and his colleagues signified their intention to 'rehabilitate' Bukharin, Rykov and Zinoviev, it was Thorez who flew to Moscow to beseech them to maintain silence (Ken Coates, *The Case of Bukharin*, Postscript)?

If Althusser wishes to revive the tradition of Thorez, then new Althusser is but old Thorez writ large. With Althusser, the critique of Stalinism has not even begun, nor can it begin, since his own thought is both the consequence of Stalinism and its continuance. But I do not wish to trespass further into French

affairs: we can safely leave this unforgiving accounting to our French comrades.

What concerned me in *The Poverty of Theory* was not the particular situation of Althusser in France – the signs, and the complexities, of that situation I may not always have correctly read – but the influence of transposed Althusserian thought outside of France. And it is necessary to note the consistent misinformation as to French political realities, and mystification as to French intellectual affairs, which has been passed upon the English-speaking Left by the British francophiles who have, for some fifteen years, been promoting a purported 'revival of Marxism' in this country.

I make no objection to francophilia. There is very much in French intellectual and political life to learn from and to admire. But our own agencies, who have taken out their franchises to import Althusser, Balibar, Poulantzas, Lacan, &c., have consistently presented images of French life and politics which are little more than fairy-tales derived from Parisian café gossip. *New Left Review* (and New Left Books) hold a particular responsibility for this, since over the past fifteen years they have issued, to the accompaniment of ecstatic 'presentations' and theoretical heavy breathing, every product, however banal, of the Althusserian *fabrik*; and, from France or about France, they have *issued nothing else*. So that, whatever esoteric reservations the *Review's* editors may hold as to Althusser, the imposition has been passed upon an innocent public that the French proletariat = the PCF, a Party supposedly composed of a heroic, uncomplicated, militant 'base', adjoined to which are rigorous and lucid Marxist theorists, imbricated in the concrete life of the Party.

One distasteful aspect of this fairy-story is that it has contributed, over the same period, to an actual breach of solidarity between ourselves and the very vigorous libertarian and anti-Stalinist Left in France, with which the first New Left had the closest fraternal associations, but whose activities are now neither examined nor even reported. So that, in the name of francophilia, exchanges have actually become more difficult

with those independent French intellectuals and activists whom the PCF has chosen to blackball or calumniate. And an equally distasteful consequence is that the *soi-disant* Marxist Left in Britain is wholly unprepared to understand the long-delayed disaster that has now, at length, overtaken the Communist intellectual tradition in France.

For the drama of the last two decades has been wholly misrepresented in this country. It has never been the arduous intellectual epic that British promoters supposed. A number of episodes have been – and have been *seen*, by an increasing number of French intellectuals, to be – farce. One does not have to be as old as Methuselah to recall the years when Roger Garaudy (the Dr John Lewis of France) held the Office of Corrector of Bourgeois Heresies throughout the Western World – an office from which he was deposed as preliminary to his reconciliation with the Catholic Church! More than in any other Western country, the PCF succeeded in intimidating their intellectuals and in neutralising them with bourgeois guilt. The intellectuals were segregated in their ghettos, and subordinated to the discipline of the Party's clerisy. The consequent rupture between theory and practice found a classical expression in Althusserian thought. More resistant to the education of experience than any other Western Communist Party, the PCF met the demise of Stalinism and the reinvigoration of capitalism with the rigorous response of an ostrich. This meant, for the Party leadership, a collapse into pragmatism and opportunism; and, for the intellectuals, a swift passage into idealism – a theoretically-justified *refusal* of evidence, of history, of 'empiricism.' Now, after many decades of battering at the door, social being is finally making a late forced entry upon social consciousness. Suddenly, the Party intellectuals in their breached fortress are making 'eloquent' and 'devastating' signals of recognition of . . . what everyone outside that fortress has long known.

I will not predict Althusser's future evolution. He is unlikely to follow the path of Garaudy. What I will predict is that all that high and rigorous theory will collapse, for a decade, into a shambles, and that the tenacious posthumous Stalinism of the

French Communist intelligentsia will vanish in a year or two amidst cries of *sauve qui peut!* I cannot say that this prospect displeases me. I found the cruel and largely-unmerited *débauche* of an honourable French Communist tradition of the Thirties and of the Resistance to be tragic; but in the last two decades I have seen less honour and more bad faith in that quarter. The work of rebuilding a libertarian revolutionary tradition in France has long been going on elsewhere.

In certain of these judgements I may be ill-informed. It is possible, even, that Althusser may prove to be more serious in his new-found anti-Stalinism than I suppose. Let us hope that this is so. But if he is to be so, then he must revoke the greater part of his own published theory. And this is what *The Poverty of Theory* is about. For the theory remains *as* theory, is replicated as theory, and is transplanted as theory, whatever personal or public contingencies arise. In this, at least, I am glad to be confirmed by Althusser. For, as he remarked rather grandly in an interview to *Les Nouvelles Littéraires* (8 June 1978): 'Philosophe, je ne suis pas piégé par les effets de la politique publique quotidienne . . .' Historian, je ne suis pas either. There is not one sentence in *The Poverty of Theory* which I wish to retract.

6 August, 1978.

Postscript

I have not contributed a position paper to this book, since *The Poverty of Theory* is that. And it remains that. I have followed and am following the discussion which is going on, in *History Workshop Journal* and elsewhere, and am learning from it. But I have not changed my positions at any central point. However, the articles of Richard Johnson and Stuart Hall raise points which require a comment.

First, I simply want to place on this table certain refusals. Of which the most substantial is this: I reject without reservation the identification of the Marxist tradition of historiography of which I have been taken as one representative of 'culturalism'. The term is of Richard Johnson's invention. He comes before us, in his article, reproving everyone except himself for 'theoretical absolutism'. This results, he argues, in an inflation of issues, 'a whole massive . . . investment in one particular set of differences.' I am told that my polemic 'hardens up differences . . . reproduces really unhelpful polarities.' Yet it is, of course, the specious opposition between his invented category, 'culturalism', and a supposedly authentic Marxism (which, however, has no representative historical works which can point to . . . as yet) which is a theoretical absolutism, and which it does all these things.

This category of culturalism is constructed from some sloppy and impressionistic history. Examine Johnson's description of 'the Moment of Culture'. 'Roughly mid-1950s – early 1960s.' 'Key texts: Raymond Williams's early work: EPT's *Making*; Hoggart's *Uses*.' This gives us a mish-mash, a 'cultural' blur. What puzzles me is that Richard Johnson, who has worked

across a corridor from Stuart Hall for several years, could read the history like that. In the mid-1950s Richard Hoggart's attitude to Marxism was one of explicit hostility, Raymond Williams's was one of active critique, Stuart Hall's (I would summarise) was one of sceptical ambivalence, whereas, from 1956 onwards, the *Reasoner* group, with which was associated, closely or loosely, a number of Marxist historians – among them John Saville, Dorothy Thompson, myself, Ralph Miliband, Michael Barratt Brown, Peter Worsley (an anthropologist, but we will allow him in), Ronald Meek, Royden Harrison, and, less closely, Christopher Hill and Rodney Hilton, and (as a friendly but politically distanced critic) Eric Hobsbawm – this group was attempting to defend, re-examine and extend the Marxist tradition at a time of political and theoretical disaster.

I am not saying that we were right, and that Hoggart or Raymond Williams or Stuart Hall were wrong. I am not trying to fight out old fraternal battles or differences over again. It may well be that we old Marxists at that time had got into ruts, and that Hoggart, Williams or Hall, running free on the surrounding terrain, helped to tow us out. What I am objecting to is this mish-mash, coming from the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies. After all, not only MI5 keeps files: some of *us* have files as well. And there were some fierce polemics in those days – for example, on the question of the Pilkington Report – which turned precisely on the question of 'cultural studies'.

What I am struggling with is the irony that we Marxists then were subjected to an unremitting critique from positions of an explicit and articulated culturalism; yet today some of those critics have turned full circle, and are accusing us, from positions which are claimed as authentically Marxist, of those culturalist sins – that 'Moment of Culture' – which was, precisely, their own. It is not a question of the theoretical rights or wrongs of the issues: the critique, then or now, may have force. It is simply a question of getting the history straight, which as historians we ought to do.

Let me give one illustration. Richard Johnson tells us that this 'Moment of Culture' produced powerful paradigms of the study of the culture: for example, the 'centrality of lived experience – cultural as a whole way of life.' When Raymond Williams's *The Long Revolution* came out, Stuart Hall, as editor of *New Left Review*, commissioned me to write a review article upon it. After reading the book I asked to be relieved of the task, since I found my theoretical differences with Williams to be so sharp that, to express them fully, would endanger the political relations of the New Left. (I mention this anecdote because it may illustrate the dangers of theoretical opportunism, or the covert suppression of differences – without any Stalinist or Leninist intervention – when one is engaged in an active, urgent and fraternal common political movement.)

Stuart Hall, who was not then, and who is not now (I think) a Stalinist, rejected my refusal and encouraged me to write out my critique fully and without inhibition. My article, which appeared in two numbers of *New Left Review* (Nos 9 and 10, May-June and July-August 1961) – in fact in three, since a page was inadvertently dropped and appeared subsequently on the line like a single sock (September-October, 1961) – was precisely a critique of Williams's claims for 'cultural history', as the history of 'a whole way of life', and a critique in terms of Marxist categories and the Marxist tradition, which offered the counter-proposal of 'a whole way of struggle', that is, class struggle. I argued in this piece:

Any theory of culture must include the concept of the dialectical interaction between culture and something that is not culture. We must suppose the raw material of life-experience to be at one pole, and all the infinitely-complex human disciplines and systems, articulate and inarticulate, formalised in institutions or dispersed in the least formal ways, which 'handle', transmit, or distort this raw material to be at the other. It is the active *process* – which is at the same time the *process through which men make their history* – that I am insisting upon.

And I argued, explicitly, that we could not grasp the one pole without the concept of the 'mode of production' nor the other pole without the concept of 'ideology'. I proposed directly that there was a theoretical gap, in the formative New Left, between Williams's 'cultural history' and the Marxist tradition, and discussed ways in which this might be bridged, or exchanges between the traditions might be most fruitful.

Any reader going back to that exchange from today's more theoretically conscious world will find my defence of the Marxist tradition to be not only lacking in confidence but also innocent. We Marxist dissidents, in the years 1956 to 1962, were beset not only by radical inner doubts and self-criticism, but also by a total climate of scepticism or active resistance to Marxism in any form. This climate permeated the New Left also, at its origin, and many comrades then shared the general view that Marxism, in its association with the Soviet state and with indefensible communist apologetics, was a liability which should be dumped, while new theories were improvised from less contaminated sources. My defence of the Marxist tradition then, against culturalism, has none of the robust confidence which characterises 'the Moment of Theory'. When I brought *Capital* forward to challenge one of Williams's propositions, I felt it obligatory to cover my quotation with an apology:

Oh, *that* book! Do we really have to go over all that old nineteenth-century stuff again? We have all felt this response: Marx has become not only an embarrassment but a bore. But *The Long Revolution* has convinced me, finally, that go over it again we must.

In the past fifteen years – 'the Moment of Theory' – this going-over has been done, even to the point of obsession. There have been some strange reversals of position in the same period. Williams has submitted some of his own culturalist positions to a self-critique far more thoroughgoing than any that I offered in 1961. Williams and, certainly, Stuart Hall have shown increas-

ing respect and confidence in the notion of a Marxism as a total and systematic theory, and, to the same degree, my own confidence in such systematisation has become less. So . . . let me make clear, once again, what I am arguing about. I am *not* proposing that, in 1961, I was right and that Hoggart, Williams or Stuart Hall were then wrong. I admire all these writers, for many things; the dialogue of the early New Left was a fruitful one, from which both traditions gained; and today I am very close indeed to Raymond Williams on critical points of theory.

My point is that my critique of what Johnson calls culturalism appeared in 1961: that is, *exactly* when I was in mid-flow in writing the *Making of the English Working Class*. And that the *Making* was written, not only during a period of polemics against Stalinism and positivist economic history, but also during a conscious and open-running critique of 'culturalism'. And it is very easy to establish this point, without resort to nuanced private histories or files.

What Richard Johnson is not interested in – what scarcely seems to enter the door of the Birmingham Centre for Cultural Studies – is any consideration of the *politics* of his 'moments'. His notion of 'theory' is abstracted from any analysis of the generative political context, and what he is interested in – and how could he write this phrase without feeling a chill somewhere in his epistemological organs? – is 'the production of really useful knowledge'. Which knowledge, however, must not be tainted by empiricism, must be at a high level of abstraction, and must point towards a Utopia when total history will at last be written. Some rather important 'texts' of that 'Moment of Culture' are altogether overlooked: Khrushchev's secret speech (a text which still requires close and symptomatic reading); the speeches of John Foster Dulles; the crisis of British imperialism at Suez; the debates at the 8th Plenum of the Polish Communist Party, the poems of Wazyk, the stories of Tibor Dery, and on and on.

What brought that jumble-sale of theoretical elements together in the first New Left was not a moment of culture at all,

but a common sense of political crisis. It was the politics of that moment which directed all of use, from different traditions, to certain common problems, which include those of class, of popular culture and of communications. Examine that moment – situate yourself for a Marxist historical or cultural analysis – and you must commence, not within theory, but within the political world. Marx would have started that way; for what concerned Marx most closely was not ‘economics’ nor even (dare I say it?) epistemology but *power*. It was to understand *power* in society that he entered that lifelong detour into economic theory.

We thought, in the late 1950s, watching the flames arise above Budapest, the traditional working-class movement erode around us, while nuclear war seemed imminent, that we had to enter different detours in pursuit of the same questions. Social being had made a convulsive and overdue entry upon social consciousness, including Marxist consciousness, and the times set us not only certain questions but indications as to how these must be pursued. This, and not culturalism, proposed the questions addressed in the *Making*. It is altogether right that readers today are dissatisfied with the book, or, if not dissatisfied, are looking for different books. Today is proposing, urgently, different questions.

But what is all this theory, or even ‘socialist history’, about it if is so ecumenical that power and politics scarcely matter at all? Richard Johnson will not have us inflating differences: our discourse must be ‘careful and respectful’ and be conducted in a ‘sisterly and brotherly way’. It is easy to be respectful, sisterly and brotherly, if one’s theory can never do so much as bend a pin in the real political world: if one never has to be called to account for one’s theories, since the gap between theory and actuality is so rarely crossed: or if theory is reduced (in part by external determinations, in part by our own inward-turning mentalities) into little more than a psychodrama within the enclosed ghetto of the theoretical left.

It is, I agree, improper to get heated about Stalinism in an

academic seminar. It is certainly wrong for elderly teachers to bully or indoctrinate the young. But is it possible to carry over the proper procedures of academic discussion into the political world just like that? For there is another political world, to which *The Poverty of Theory* was addressed. And it is a world which, like it or not, is less than sisterly or brotherly, in which we must acknowledge solidarities, and discriminate between theoretical kin.

I was going to leave it at that. But I have recently received this criticism from many quarters – ‘fighting old battles’ and the like – and something more must be said. There is, first, the matter of aggression. *The Poverty of Theory* is sometimes presented as an unseemly act of aggression, breaking in upon and disorganising a constructive, ‘careful and respectful’ discourse of the theoretical left. But, from the position of my tradition, the matter of aggression can be seen very differently. For a full decade a theoreticist and structuralist campaign had been directed at our positions, for their supposed ‘empiricism’, ‘humanism’, ‘moralism’, ‘historicism’, theoretical vacuity, etc. This campaign had almost overwhelmed the older Marxist tradition in sociology, rooted itself deeply in the criticisms of film, art and literature, and was massing on the borders of history. What seemed to be at risk, then, was not this or that book of mine or of Genovese’s – and I don’t at all wish to protect our work from criticism – but a whole tradition of Marxist historical practice, which had never been theoretically vacant, and whose very continuity seemed to be under threat. In this sense, *The Poverty of Theory* was not an act of aggression but a counter-attack against a decade of Althusserian dismissal.

Second, I really don’t think that Richard Johnson himself understands the way in which a certain kind of appeal for an absence of polemic, for ‘careful and respectful’ discussion in ‘brotherly and sisterly’ ways, can be a stratagem for doing two things: first, removing socialist theory from a political to an academic context, and he also insists that ‘the Moment of Theory’

must be removed from context also. To point out, as I have done, that this Moment originates in the work of Althusser, in a very particular context of polemic (as well as organisational measures, expulsions, controls, etc.) within the French Communist Party against libertarian and humanist critics within the French Marxist and socialist movement is to introduce improper (untheoretical) considerations.

But this is pre-emption with a vengeance. It is to say that discussion must be on the ground which he has indicated and on no other. It is to say, also, that considerations of ideology, while no doubt proper when we are examining racism, sexism, empiricism, humanism and the rest, are quite improper – even inconceivable – when considering the communist or Marxist movement, where all arises in a medium of pure theory. Richard Johnson declares, in his position paper, in his careful and respectful way, that 'I see *The Poverty of Theory* as mainly mischievous in its effects.' I have been trying to explain why I find his new absolutist category of 'culturalism' to be mischievous also. It is a category which he has shown, not only into national but also into international discourse, and, if uncontested, it would lead to serious misrecognitions, and threaten to close off or eject a large and still-creative tradition of open-ended Marxist or marxisant historical practice. But to contest that ejection it is not adequate to enter meekly upon the ground which he has declared to be legitimate, and then argue respectfully that this is or that formulation is incorrect. It is necessary to refuse his ground and his terms.

In doing this, voices sometimes get raised. And I am chided for this by Gareth Stedman Jones, a comrade and historian whom I greatly respect. He says, in *History Workshop Journal* 8, 'Since *Pre-Capitalist Modes of Production* and *The Poverty of Theory*, the tone of debate has fallen to the worst standards of the Cold War. . . . We are enjoined to think in manichean terms'. Now this also seems to me to be pre-emption – again, perhaps, unconscious – of a different kind. I must remind you where *The*

Poverty of Theory came from. It came from the socialist and Marxist tradition, in particular from the tradition of the *Reasoner*. All of the comrades associated with that tradition lived through the worst years of the ideological Cold War, and we were at the receiving end of it. When our own crisis came, in 1956 or thereabouts, not one person in that tradition of Marxist historiography ran to *Encounter*, lamented that our God had failed, or called for the wholesale rejection of the Marxist tradition. Nor did we quit the socialist movement: there are at least four members of the board of the old *New Reasoner* (John Saville, Dorothy Thompson, Peter Worsley and myself) at this workshop today. I mention these points because I think they argue an entitlement in us – when we confront what appear to be over-familiar idealist deformations, as well as large and guilty silences, in what passes as a Marxism – to argue the points, within the left, sharply and with force. *The Poverty of Theory* was a political intervention, coming from a socialist publishing house and addressed to the left.

We cannot discuss Marxist theory today, carefully and respectfully, while holding the hand over the fact that in huge territories of the world power is endorsed by a state-orthodoxy called Marxism, which is profoundly authoritarian and hostile to libertarian values. Those who ask us not to mention such matters too loudly, in the name of solidarity on the 'left', are simply asking to be left in the possession of the field – to define what the 'left' is – and using solidarity as a gag. They are also reassuring us, without permitting an inspection, that there could not possibly be any *theoretical* component in the disasters of real socialist history.

Now I find this very strange. Because the same theorists are very sensitive, and sometimes enlightening, in showing us the way in which capitalist, racist or sexist ideologies reproduce themselves by theoretical means. But for some reason 'Marxism' is proclaimed as utterly exempt from similar 'protocols': it is improper even to suggest that Stalinist ideology, or

authoritarian, elitist, inhumane and philistine attitudes could reproduce themselves within Marxism by theoretical means. A very special privilege, an immunity from ideology, is claimed. Well, I have argued otherwise in *The Poverty of Theory*: I have argued that 'the Moment of Theory' had ideological origins, that structuralism has enabled vast areas of guilty silence to be kept as to Stalinist practice, and I have even argued, more carefully than some critics suppose, the difference between Stalinism as a historical eventuation and Stalinism as an existing ideological tradition. I have been trying to establish libertarian positions, not just on a basis of moralism or utopian aspiration, but at a level of theory: and such a splitting-apart of authoritarian and libertarian elements within a common theoretical tradition cannot be effected without a polemic which must, on occasion, appear 'manichean'.

I will agree, however, that the indiscriminate hurling around of accusations of 'Stalinism' is no more helpful to thought or practice than any other sort of indiscriminate boo word: racism, empiricism, sexism or humanism. Discrimination is what matters. What matters is to explore those large and guilty areas of silence which Althusserianism walled off with its own boo words and its own specious appeals to a solidarity of the 'left' which left its practitioners in command of every wall. If Gareth Stedman Jones means that 'Stalinism' is a term so heavy with emotion that it cannot be used for discrimination, then – if he will also agree that the other walls must be pulled down which have for too long protected that historical and theoretical object from analysis – I will attend to his objection with care and respect.

Some more refusals, very much more briefly. They chiefly concern Stuart Hall's article. What puzzles me about this is that it carries a whole set of assertions as to my positions which are not founded upon any careful attention to my text. Of course I see a problem in empiricism. I certainly do not reject filiations between law and class rule in the twentieth-century – although

I do not always see these as he does, I have argued the complexity of these, and I have certainly not argued '*contra* the left, *tout court*'. I certainly do not reject concepts of structure: I am at pains to distinguish such valid conceptual and heuristic organisations from structuralism. I am astonished to find that ideology is an 'absent category' from my work.

I am also astonished to find that I present values and norms as 'transcendental human values *outside* of real historical conditions', a point which also appears in Simon Clarke's generous and historically informed critique 'Abstract and Ahistorical Moralism', *History Workshop Journal* 8, p. 154. This seems to me to indicate a serious closure or refusal which still marks the Marxist tradition. For what I actually say about this – 'A materialist examination of values must situate itself, not by idealist propositions, but in the face of culture's material abode: the people's way of life, and, above all, their productive and familial relationships' (*Poverty of Theory*, p. 238) – allows no warrant for this dismissal. This continues to be, as in my revised *William Morris*, and my ongoing work on eighteenth-century customs, a central piece of my own historical and theoretical engagement: neither abstract, nor a-historical, nor transcendental, but contextual and materialist.

I am surprised to find that, in my attempts to define the historical discipline, with its own logic or discourse of the proof, I have given the impression that all 'History' is somehow immune from ideological intrusion and may stand above other disciplines as a 'judge'. And, finally, I am surprised to find that readers still think that I have proposed some 'culturalist' theory of class, in which people float free of economic determinations and discover themselves in terms of some immaterial consciousness. (I have written about this, to different effect, repeatedly: most recently in *Social History*, Vol. 3, no. 2: but see also the excellent study by R. W. Connell, 'A Critique of the Althusserian Approach to Class', *Theory and Society*, 8, 1979.)

I am not attempting to refuse all criticism. I am refusing

the category of 'culturalism' (which I see as one more wall of silence), and inaccurate criticism. As for the general debate in HWJ I have found much in it that is constructive, and clearly find many points made by McLelland, Tim Mason, Clarke, Williams and Stedman Jones to be helpful. The clarification of concepts in *Capital* and respecting the Marxist notation of the capitalist mode of production is very certainly helpful; and I am more than willing to accept (and welcome) correction and clarification in economic theory, where my work has obvious weaknesses.

There are still certain difficulties in this exchange. That is, it is not helpful to criticise me or Genovese for not having written out different versions of *Capital*, when our objects of study and our particular skills were not those of Marx! We have both been working in a Marxist tradition of historiography, supported by the skills of colleagues in adjacent disciplines, and chastised or enlightened by the criticism. When writing the *Making*, whose central object of study was a moment of class formation, I compensated for my own weakness in economic theory by borrowing heavily from that tradition (Marx or Dobb) or by exchanges with colleagues (John Saville, Hobsbawm and others). I am sure that weaknesses remain, which merit criticism. But I am distinctly unhappy – especially in relation to Marxist historiography – at this tendency towards a cult of the methodological individual, whose themes, objects of study and characteristic weaknesses (or even strengths) must be prematurely defined as identifying an absolutist position. It is not only that this puts upon an individual's work more than it can bear (unless one is a Marx, which none of us are), thereby distracting attention from equally significant adjacent work within a common tradition. It is also that it erects walls within a tradition, which need not be there. In fact, in the British Marxist tradition of historiography these walls just have not existed: colleagues of much harder – even 'economistic' – emphasis have argued with me, and I have argued back, and we have both

learned from the exchange, just as the very different traditions of the Society for the Study of Labour History, *Past and Present*, *Social History*, *New Left Review* and the History Workshop engage in fruitful exchanges today. If I have resisted structuralism so vigorously – and refuse with vigour the attempt to label a whole ongoing tradition of work as 'culturalism' – it is exactly because we should not allow these absolutist walls to be built and to interrupt our exchanges.

The other difficulty in the exchange is that some of the contributors, while making valuable criticisms, appear to wish to reconstruct Marxism-as-system (Tim Mason of course is a warm exception) – and sometimes (as Gareth Stedman Jones suggests, HWJ 8) a system reconstructed in their own image. This is a difficult distance to argue across, but I hope that we can continue to do so. A characteristic of his notion of Marxism-as-system is an insistent attribution of heuristic priority, not only in an epochal sense, but in every detail of method, to the mode of production: the notion persists that, once this can be really theorised and put together with all the bits (including aesthetics and the common law) in the right places, all problems of explanation are ended; indeed, one might then not have to research history at all, because the theory would anticipate the results. I have explained, and I hope with some care, in *The Poverty of Theory*, why I reject this notion of 'theory' – in explaining everything, in one complex gulp, it leaves the actual history unexplained.

This is not, of course, a question of whether we need theory or not. Do I need to say that the title of my book did not invoke the jettisoning of all theory, any more than Marx, in writing *The Poverty of Philosophy*, intended to jettison all philosophy? My critique was of Theory, of the notion that it could all, somehow, be put together, as a system, by theoretical means. In every moment of our work we certainly need theory – whether in defining problems of the mode of production, or micro-economics, or the family, or culture or the state – and we

need research which is both empirically and theoretically informed, and the theorised interrogation of what this research finds.

Two self-critical points. The first arises generally, but particularly in Gavin Kitching's position paper. What surprised me in Kitching was his assertion that I collapse exploitation into the *experience* of exploitation, reject material causes going on 'behind the back' of consciousness, suppose consciousness to be in some way 'autonomous' of any material determinations, and suppose that class arises in such ways. This is to repeat a similar line of critique in Johnson's original article.¹ This stands so much against the whole tenor of my work (and that of the older Marxist tradition of historiography) that I must suppose that the reading arises from a lack of clarity in my own definitions.

Some of the fault lies with my critics. They persistently refuse to examine seriously the discriminations which Raymond Williams and I have made as to determination in its sense of 'setting limits' and 'exerting pressures', and which I have made as to 'junction-concepts'. But the other part may lie in my own use of 'experience'. For experience is exactly what makes the junction between culture and not-culture, lying half within social being, half within social consciousness. We might perhaps call these experiences I – lived experience – and II – perceived experience.

Many contemporary epistemologists and sociologists, when they hear the word 'experience', immediately reach for experience II. That is, they move directly to what Marx called social consciousness. They then go on to show that experience II is a very imperfect and falsifying medium, corrupted by ideological intrusions, and so on. They even read us little epistemological lessons, to show that different persons experience the same thing differently, that experience is organised according to presuppositions and within ideologically-formed categories, etc. Which is all so. But this is exactly why I was so heavy about the distinctive discipline, the discourse of the proof,

of the historian. Historians within the Marxist tradition – as well as many without – have for so long been using the term 'experience' in a different way that I had come to assume this usage so deeply myself that in *The Poverty of Theory* I did not adequately explain it.

What we see – and study – in our work are repeated events within 'social being' – such events being indeed often consequent upon material causes which go on behind the back of consciousness or intention – which inevitably do and must give rise to lived experience, experience I, which do not instantly break through as 'reflections' into experience II, but whose pressure upon the whole field of consciousness cannot be indefinitely diverted, postponed, falsified or suppressed by ideology. I gestured in *The Poverty of Theory* (p11) to the kind of collective experience, within social being, which I mean:

Experience walks in without knocking at the door, and announces deaths, crises of subsistence, trench warfare, unemployment, inflation, genocide. People starve: their survivors think in new ways about the market. People are imprisoned: in prison they meditate in new ways about the law.

And I argued:

changes take place within social being, which give rise to changed *experience*: and this experience is *determining*, in the sense that it exerts pressures upon existent social consciousness, proposes new questions, and affords much of the material which the more elaborated intellectual exercises are about.

How else can a materialist explain historical change with any rationality at all? How else, at a time like our own, are we to suppose that there can ever be any human remedy to the hegemonic domination of the mind, the false descriptions of reality reproduced daily by the media? Experience I is in eternal friction with imposed consciousness, and, as it breaks through, we,

who fight in all the intricate vocabularies and disciplines of experience II, are given moments of openness and opportunity before the mould of ideology is imposed once more.

The second self-criticism is too complex to work out, except with pain and at length. I doubt whether I am competent to attempt it. When he had read *Poverty of Theory* Hans Medick wrote to me to argue that, when I offered to establish the objectivity both of the historical discipline and of its object – the finished historical process, with its pattern of (ultimately unknowable) causation – I had lurched towards that positivism which, at other points, I attempt to confront. I had put Popper out at the front door, and then sneaked him in again at the back. In short, by placing fact here and value there, I had opened my argument to serious error.

I sent a grumpy answer to Hans Medick, but on reflection I think that he is right, or partially right. The fact is – and David Selborne in his paper makes this point² – we are all making ferocious or lofty epistemological faces, but most of us, especially in Britain, are the merest novices in philosophy. A training by way of Althusser (who himself makes gross logical blunders) or by way of a critique of Althusser is not an adequate substitute for a more rigorous preparation. In my present view, the distinction offered in *The Poverty of Theory* remains valid, in the sense that the historical discipline (its 'discourse of the proof') presupposes that an encounter with objective evidence is what is at issue: and particular techniques and a particular disciplinary logic have been devised to that end. But I concede also that the historian, in every moment of his or her work, is a value-formed being, who cannot, when proposing problems or interrogating evidence, in fact operate in this value-free way. Medick considers that Habermas has disclosed the nature of this problem and that we should attend more carefully to his writing. I hope that Medick will write further and assist us through this difficult point.

Finally, what, oh what, are we to do with our good friend

Philip Corrigan? Does he *know* what he has written? Philip Corrigan, the enemy of theoretical 'terrorism' – how on earth did his typewriter encompass that sentence, the most defeatist and terrorist of all? 'It seems to me time, to be honest, to recognise that History is a cultural form engaged in practices of regulation just like Law – it is one of the ways in which the subordinated are encouraged to agree to their own confinement.' That *is* what he has written. Not that History can *sometimes* be that: not that this is an ideological deformation or 'capture' of History, which may go on, in certain academic circles, or in school curricula, or even as popular myth. This point should certainly be taken. But that History is . . . just that. Hindess and Hirst come back! All is forgiven! no blow you ever struck was as unkind as this!

No intellectual discipline or art is a cultural form engaged only in practices or regulation, not even law. As Corrigan, of course, well knows. History is a form within which we fight, and many have fought before us. Nor are we alone when we fight there. For the past is not just dead, inert, confining; it carries signs and evidences also of creative resources which can sustain the present and prefigure possibility.

NOTES

- 1 See Richard Johnson, 'Thompson, Genovese and socialist-humanist history', *History Workshop Journal*, 6, Autumn 1978, and subsequent discussions in issues 7, 8 and 9.
- 2 See David Selborne, 'On the methods of the History Workshop', *History Workshop Journal*, 8, Spring 1980.

